







## **A ROVING COMMISSION**





# A ROVING COMMISSION

BY

HENRY NEWMAN

author of 'Indian Peepshow'

LONDON

G. BELL AND SONS LTD

1937

*Printed in Great Britain by the Camelot Press Limited  
London and Southampton*

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
1. BOUND FOR CHINA . . . . .	I
2. THE RELIEF OF THE LEGATIONS . . . . .	17
3. THE LOOTING OF PEKIN . . . . .	51
4. BACK FROM THE FRONT . . . . .	69
5. WAR IN TIBET . . . . .	87
6. MAGIC VERSUS MACHINE GUN . . . . .	110
7. BITTER FIGHTING AT GYANTSE . . . . .	128
8. LHASA UNVEILED . . . . .	162
9. FIGHTING THE MOHMANDS . . . . .	198
10. THE THIRD AFGHAN WAR . . . . .	220
11. STRANGE END TO A WAR . . . . .	254
12. ALARMS AND EXCURSIONS . . . . .	290



## BOUND FOR CHINA

The forepart of the ship was crammed with fighting men of the martial races of the Punjab – Sikhs, Dogras, and Pathans. In the poop were housed the brigadier and his staff, the officers of the 21st Punjabis, Mr. Valentia Steer of the *Daily Mail* and myself. We were a happy company sailing down the Hughli, for we felt we were bound on a gallant adventure. The year was 1900, and our mission was nothing less than that of succouring the Legations at Peking, then besieged by Boxers.

How well I remember the morning when we got out of the river into the bay. The day was particularly pleasant; there was a kind of briskness and crispness in the air; the water had changed from yellow to green, and I never think the sea is so pleasant as when it is green and the water is stirred just a little by the breeze. Everybody on the poop felt the cheerfulness of the morning.

An officer of Punjabis quoted the beginning of that fine poem which is sometimes called 'A Pilot of the Ganges':

Bc

## A ROVING COMMISSION

'I have slipped my cable, messmates, I am drifting down,  
with the tide,  
I have my sailing orders, while ye at anchor ride;  
And never on a fair June morning have I put out to sea  
With a brighter hope, or a surer faith or a heart more  
light and free.'

Little did any of us realise what was going to happen in the next few minutes.

I have started off without saying something which I should have said at first. It is this, that I want to write what follows rather in the vein of a man lying on a deck of a pleasure cruiser relating to other passengers some story or other. A few passengers may listen to him, others will hear – half hear – and let him flow on, and some continue to gaze out to sea, dreaming their own dreams and not attaching any sense to the words that fall upon their ears. Or I might be a bearded man with rings in my ears talking to a wide-eyed boy on the sands of what is now called a seaside resort. Or you can imagine me sitting by a fireside, filling my pipe, talking to an old crony who has perhaps heard the tale before, but is too lazy or too polite to say so. He may have his own dreams also.

I make these remarks because I wish the reader to know that this book is not being written in the spirit of a historian who surrounds himself with books of reference, authenticated documents, official letters, .

## BOUND FOR CHINA

files, tables and maps, to ensure that he is not making any mistakes with regard to dates or personages and that his statements are correct. I have found that the average man who attempts to be a historian is apt to involve himself in a pedantic and sticky style. He is so busy looking up things that his narrative is interrupted and does not flow easily; what should be a pleasant task becomes a tedious labour. This book is being written out of my head. No papers or books of reference lie around. If, in spite of that, the narrative is still sticky and tedious, I can say no more than that perhaps what I relate is not in itself of any interest.

Very well. While we were going down the bay something else was coming up to meet us, something from the South Pole. There is no land between the head of the bay and the South Pole. What we met was a slow comber having its origin away in the south and moving slowly up the sea. Although I have no authority for saying so, I believe that these extraordinary waves, though they may not break the surface of the water, may extend to eighty or ninety feet in depth below the water; that is to say the water is in motion to that depth. In an instant the steamer heeled over; down and down she heeled, and we were all thrown into the scuppers before we knew what was happening. For the moment I thought that the ship would never right herself, but



she did finally, and it was then that the disaster followed.

That is another of my dramatic tricks. For what I call a disaster was something which only moved the skipper and some of the sailors to smiles. Practically every man in the whole company of adventurers on the poop became seasick. In a half-dazed way I was watching the face of an officer gradually turning the same green as that of the sea, when I felt that my own colour was changing. I think that the only man among us who did not collapse was the brigadier, Sir Norman Stewart.

Days passed, and the ship went on her way, but Singapore was behind us before I was able to stagger up to the poop; there to find a lot of pale-faced men lying about and smiling at each other in a ghastly way. Once when I was relating this story just as I am telling it to you now, a man present, who had sailed in many seas, said he had never heard such nonsense, and that people do not become seasick on the instant a ship begins to roll; it takes a little time before the inwards yield to the unaccustomed motion. To this man I replied that, although he may have sailed many seas, he had apparently never been in an earthquake, for many people get sick during an earthquake and that, sometimes, is a matter not of minutes but of seconds. But let us leave this disagreeable subject and get on with the story.

In due course we sailed past the pleasant islands that lie about the Malay Peninsula and made for Hong Kong. Sometimes we were in sight of the main China coast, and what struck me was how bold and fine were the headlands. One had read so much about the alluvial plains of China that it came as a surprise to find these gaunt outlines. But I must not dwell on the voyage because there are more exciting things to describe.

In short we arrived at Hong Kong; we stayed there a day or two. Had we not been on an adventure I would have liked to stay there for years, for there was so much to see and learn. I learnt one lesson, though. I had gone ashore to get some money. The cashier at the bank to which I went was rather slow, and in order to hasten him I said: 'Chop, chop,' which I had always understood meant 'quickly.' A great smile illuminated his face. He picked up a bag of dollars and began to count them out as fast as possible. 'Excuse me,' said a voice at my elbow, 'the cashier is giving you chop dollars. Do you really want them?' I said I did not know what he meant. He then explained that a chop dollar was a dollar made in China and of inferior silver. When such dollars came into the possession of a bank a cut was made in them to make them easily recognisable. It was very hard, my friend added, to pass these dollars. That was a piece of

information that I passed on to the army officers of the ship, and they were grateful, for many of them were loaded with chop dollars.

Wei-hai-wei next. Everybody called it Wee-Wee, but whether that was the correct pronunciation or not I do not know. There we embarked some men and an officer or two of the Chinese Regiment. Of course, our officers of the Indian Army were very interested in these men of the Chinese Regiment, for in those days there was an idea in India that perhaps if recruits were particularly needed at any time for the Imperial forces they might be found among the Chinese who had settled in our possessions in the Far East. The men looked quite as smart as Gurkhas and seemed as keen, but later on it was found that it was asking too much of them to fight against their own countrymen. Various detachments of the Chinese Regiment had reached Tientsin when the march on Peking began, but every day there were fewer men, and I am told that before Peking was entered practically all the men had deserted. This may be a libel on the regiment, but I think it is certain that a good few men did desert, and in any case the Chinese Regiment did not play a prominent part in the operations before or after the relief of the Legations. Presently it disappeared from the Army List.

. One evening at dinner the bearded skipper

## BOUND FOR CHINA

announced that we were due at Taku next morning. We were up early and agog to see this port, which was then crammed with the warships and transports of all the great nations of the world. We saw the warships and the transports and other steamers stretching line upon line into the horizon, but there was no port of Taku to see. Why? Because Taku was a name for that bit of the Yellow Sea where the bar at the mouth of the Pei-ho begins. The big ships could go no farther. We found a place in the line, and then for two days we stared at each other, for it did not seem that anything was going to happen. Nobody took any notice of us. Launches fussed to and fro amidst the other ships, and eight-oared cutters left the sides of the warships apparently only for the purpose of exercise. But there came an hour when a light-draft steamer came up alongside of us in a dashing and dangerous way, tied itself to us, and we were told to board it and be off. So hopes of adventure revived again.

The little steamer we were now on must have steamed for several hours before we got sight of land, and then it was that low-lying alluvial land that one hears of as forming the coast of China. The mouth of the Taku is very like the mouth of the Hughli, yellow water and a great deal of sand. And now I must say that I have quite forgotten the name of the spot at which we were landed, but it

was very busy indeed, with light-draft steamers tied up everywhere, lines of sheds, a railway-station and what not. In fact, here was a port. And another thing, as we steamed up past the other steamers and jetties, multitudes of soldiers of all nations appeared and cheered us. There were Russians and Nipponese (I say Nipponese because I learned that the Japanese prefer to be so styled), Frenchmen, Italians and others that I know not of, but whose uniforms were new and strange. All these people shouted and waved. It was almost as if we had come to rescue them.

And so we set foot on Chinese shores.

It was easy to see that the Indian soldiery made a great impression upon the troops of other races. The bearded Sikhs looked particularly warlike with their great turbans and fierce features, and they entirely overshadowed the troops of other nations in size. The Pathans, too, were a big lot; the Dogras may not have been as big as the others, but, like the others, they were smart and clean, and altogether a different type from the bedraggled soldiery that greeted us.

The British camp commandant told us that we were lucky because he had been able to secure a troop train for Tientsin for us and it would arrive next morning. 'Other troops,' he said, 'have had to wait for weeks before they could get forward.'

He said that the railway service was being run by a Russian railway battalion, and the Russians, just as any other people would have done, preferred to look after the interests of their own troops before the interests of other troops.

We slept anyhow that night, and true enough, next morning a lengthy train arrived, groaning and creaking. The front carriages were occupied by Russian soldiers and a batch of five Russian officers; but there was a first-class carriage or two reserved for us. Our troops, I think, were put into cattle trucks.

Just before the train started there was an unexpected scene. A Russian officer arrived on the platform accompanied by two ladies, apparently his wife and daughter. He was a high officer, because the other Russians jumped out of their carriages, stood to attention and saluted him. Then each officer in turn went up to the two ladies and kissed them fervently on both cheeks. Apparently this embracing was a normal custom of Russians in that part of the world. When the kissing-parade was over the train started.

We had not gone more than half a mile out of the station when we realised that we had entered a war area. Everywhere there were signs of havoc and destruction; villages burnt down, hasty repairs at railway stations, and trampled crops. More than that, dotted along the line there were

shallow trenches facing outwards and occupied by groups of Russian soldiers. We rather scoffed at the Russian trenches, for they were not more than a foot deep and hardly afforded any protection at all. We also smiled at the Russian uniform, because the Russians were wearing white blouses which could be seen from a long way off. And the Russian soldiers, at that time at any rate, never unfixed bayonets; the flashes of these useless weapons carried their message to a distance like the flashing of a heliograph. It was perhaps just as well that there were no Boxers left in that part of China. We were soon to come into contact with them, but that was on the other side of Tientsin. But before I go any further it would be as well to explain about these Boxers.

The term which we, in a neat way, translated as Boxer, really means in Chinese the 'Society of Harmonious Fists.' This society was formed as the result of a miscalculation made by that very astute and dangerous woman, the Dowager Empress of China. During the years preceding 1900 the attention of Europe was so directed towards what was happening in South Africa and what had happened in Egypt and the Sudan, that certain events in China passed unnoticed. At that time all the Powers were intriguing for territorial concessions in China. The Dowager Empress, aware that she had no means of

fighting the Powers (for such armies as then existed in China were Provincial armies, not Imperial), conceived the idea of setting the Powers against each other by granting them large territorial concessions; but she did not let the country at large into her secret, and what the country at large thought was that she was deliberately handing them over to the care of foreign devils.

The Society of Harmonious Fists was only one of many that were started for the purpose of expelling the foreigner from China; but in Northern China it finally absorbed all the others. Presently, from being a secret society, it became a sort of public one, and openly invited members. Meetings were held in public places and a wave of indignation against the foreigner was excited among all classes of Chinese. The meetings in a short time changed their character; activities, which had once been restricted to making speeches and reading leaflets, now took the form of rehearsals for war. But these simple Chinese did not connect war with field exercises, manœuvres, or drill. They exercised themselves by literally boxing the air, that is to say, they clenched their fists and flung their arms about, pretending to fight imaginary enemies. Still later, swords took the place of fists, and some Boxer military genius invented a scabbard which held two swords so that members of the society



might advance on the foe with a sword in each hand.

When the anti-foreign movement first started, the foreigners in China were not much disturbed by it; and it was the cue of the anti-foreign societies not to alarm the foreigner in any way, the idea being, of course, that when the time came the foreigners would be taken by surprise and all destroyed in one day. Even to the day when swords were issued to the Boxers and flourished about in the streets and parks with cries of 'sha, sha' (meaning 'kill, kill'), the foreigners thought the Boxer demonstrations were amusing; and I was told in Tientsin that parties would go to look at Boxers exercising.

But before the society had actually settled on the day when the uprising was to be general and instantaneous, some of the more youthful and less disciplined members of it had begun to display open animosity against individual foreigners whom they saw in the streets. Abusive words were uttered, challenges issued and sometimes stones flung. It was at this period that the Legations in Peking became alarmed, as the demonstrations were most open and flagrant in Northern China. The various Ministers asked for extra guard, and detachments of troops were sent to Peking by Japan and Russia. Sailors and marines were landed from British warships, and while the sailors remained in Tientsin the

marines were taken up to Peking. But these measures were thought to be merely precautionary, and, absorbed, as I have said, in the Boer War, Europe took little notice of what was happening in the Far East. Then one day the German Minister in Peking, who was on his way to the Imperial palace to remonstrate about some matter under dispute, was held up by a furious mob and murdered. That was the signal for a general rising against foreigners in Peking, but luckily the Legations, as I have said, had been reinforced, and the mob was not able to rush them. Local mobs massacred missionaries in various stations in the interior, and a large and furious crowd from Tientsin city marched to the railway-station and destroyed it. Luckily the settlement had been warned, and there were troops and volunteers enough to prevent the Boxers entering the European quarters of the city.

Of course, when the news of this reached Europe, every Power which had a Legation in Peking took steps to despatch troops there. The British warships in Far Eastern waters steamed hastily northward, and a large body of sailors was disembarked at Taku under Admiral Seymour himself. A request was sent to the Indian Government to send a contingent from the army in India, and a division of infantry and a cavalry brigade were mobilised to sail as soon as transport was available.

got the same pay as the eldest brother. There were no rules governing the discipline or training of these Bannermen. There was no discipline and no training, and in fact, no kind of organisation except that which enabled them to draw their pay. As generation succeeded generation the Bannermen lost all their warlike and ferocious instincts. They became slothful and given to opium and other vices. They never thought of investing in arms; many had no arms at all, and others, though they were supposed to be an Imperial Guard, carried nothing better than bows and arrows or spears. That was the condition of the only army over which the Dowager Empress had any kind of control. When the troubles began and the Pechili troops joined hands with the Boxers, the Empress called upon the Bannermen to mobilise. There was no response.

There came a time, however, when the Bannermen did get together with their bows and arrows and other weapons of Ningveh and Babylon; but of that time I will speak in due course, for it was my privilege to see the Bannermen in being. They were either very old men or children. But have patience. At present I am on the way to Tientsin.

## THE RELIEF OF THE LEGATIONS

I was in China as a journalist and entitled for the first time to call myself a war correspondent. The papers I was representing were the *Daily Telegraph* and an Indian syndicate which included the *Englishman* and the *Times of India*. I was then an assistant editor on the *Englishman* and very disgusted and annoyed because that paper did not see why I should go to South Africa. Then, one day, Mr. Blair, the editor of the *Englishman*, came to me and said, 'Would you care to go to China with the Indian contingent?' and he then explained that the *Daily Telegraph* wanted a man at once, to sail from Calcutta with the Indian Expeditionary Force and be in time for the relief of the Legations. So that, my boy, is how I came to be in Tientsin with the 21st Punjabis and the others.

The railway station, as I have said, was burnt out, and only a guard of Russians was present on the platform when the train steamed in. We bundled ourselves and our goods out of the train, and presently a big fatigue party of sepovs arrived to help

with the baggage of our troops. But Steer and myself were no longer attached to the troops or to anybody, and we could hardly expect the sepoys to carry our kit for us, particularly as we had not arranged to mess with the officers or at army headquarters. But there were some Chinese coolies about, and we made for the Astor Hotel, which we were told was the place to put up at.

I think we marched through the French Settlement before we got to the English one and to the Astor Hotel. It showed no signs of life; in fact, both the French and English Settlements were singularly devoid of any inhabitants whether Chinese or European. After shouting and knocking at the big entrance door of the hotel, the door was opened and a big man appeared at the entrance. 'The hotel is closed,' he said, and he then explained that all the Chinese servants had run away, and that there was no food in the hotel, even if there had been anyone to serve it. We explained that all we wanted was a room each to begin with, and we would look after the feeding business ourselves. So, with an ill grace the manager showed us a couple of rooms. I noticed that there were other rooms which also showed signs of occupation.

Having deposited our baggage, we went down into the big lounge and stared at each other. 'What next?' Obviously the only thing to do was

to go out and see what we could see, and make some arrangement for food and feeding. In the street we met a cheerful American who turned out to be a newspaper man himself. He said he could put us wise to things, and he did. First he took us to the Club, where there were, at the moment, only a few people. We had a scratch meal there, and our friend explained that we could get anything we wanted at the Club, and all we had to do was to sign. 'The beauty of it,' he added, 'is that even at the end of the month they will not accept money from anybody. They want signed chits. These they take to the bank, which credits them with the money and debits your account.'

'What if we have no accounts?' I asked.

'That is why I call the system beautiful. None of us have any account, but the Club does not seem to have tumbled to the fact; nor does the bank.'

'Sounds like *Alice in Wonderland*,' said Steer.

Later on I discovered that amongst Europeans at the Chinese ports very little actual money passed; everything was done by means of chits, which were cashed at the local bank where everybody had an account. The reason of this unusual practice was that the *tael*, round which all prices centred, was not an actual coin, but a weight, the value of which fluctuated from day to day. Why people did not insist on being paid in dollars which were in circulation

still remained a mystery; for surely they could vary prices as the dollar varied in value. Anyway, they seemed to prefer this upside down way of doing things, and, of course, it suited us strangers very well.

Why didn't the Club committee look into this matter of the crowds of non-members who were invading the Club and not paying for anything? I can tell you in a word. Everybody in Tientsin was too preoccupied with the situation to care what was happening to the finances of the Club, and many of the Club members, I regret to say, were out looting in the Chinese quarters. That, too, was the explanation of the deserted streets and of the hotel whose servants had fled. Everybody had fled to the rich bazaars of Tientsin, there to take what they could.

Later on, we went to see something of what was going on in the way of loot. We ourselves went under the direction of somebody who had attached himself to us. As we were going out along a main street we found the looters returning. The Chinese were carrying bundles on their heads; the Europeans were driving Chinese carts and other conveyances loaded up with silks and stuff. Everybody seemed to me to be in a happy, excited mood. Laws were in abeyance and every man did what he liked. And there was so much loot that the time had not yet come when people were likely to quarrel about it.

\*Some panic had seized the better-class Chinese and

they had fled, and behind them had followed the lower-class labourers and servitors who thought that the foreign devils, now on their way up from the coast, would surely tear them to pieces.

That first day I had a wish to join the crowd of looters myself, but there seemed nothing to tempt me, and presently I went back with Steer to the Club. I think it was Steer who said that he had a tent in his baggage, and we decided to put the tent up in a compound which seemed to be occupied by Indian troops of some kind, but the troops were only a guard to an Indian post office.

But it would be tedious to recall our doings from day to day while preparations were being made for the march up to Peking. I was able to buy from some man, who had no right to them, a good China cart and a Manchu pony, a stout beast which did me good service later on. Most of the time we spent at the Club collecting news. And it was fearful and wonderful news. I did not believe a word of it, because I only heard it from the lips of people who knew as little about what was happening at Peking as I did. Occasionally, something was doled out to enquirers at the headquarters of the British force. American headquarters were more liberal with their news, but again I thought the news was not trustworthy. Then there were quite a number of American correspondents, and a few Germans and



Frenchmen. Presently the batch of war correspondents at Tientsin was joined by a knot of dapper journalists from Japan. These smiling fellows arrived in very correct European civil clothes. The next morning they were all in khaki like the British.

One day there was tense excitement at the Club. A report had come in that the Boxers, assisted by Chinese troops, had penetrated the Legations and had massacred every living person within them. I refused to believe this story, but the majority of other correspondents did believe it, and some, I regret to say, even sent off elaborate and ghastly details of what had happened, saying that they had learned it from Chinese who had arrived from Peking. I suppose some of those who read this will remember the painful impression made in Europe by the story of the massacres. A memorial service was held at St. Paul's and almost every newspaper in Europe called for vengeance upon China. A China which had broken what was almost a sacred law amongst nations, that of the sanctity attaching to foreign embassies. Hasty arrangements were made everywhere to send more troops, and the German Emperor made very impressive speeches on the subject of the mailed fist. I think that was the first occasion on which that expression was employed.

Of course, in a few days the lie was exploded. The Boxers had not got into the Legations. An

attempt was made to discover who started this story, and I think that they found out that it was sent, to begin with, to a London newspaper from Shanghai. This paper printed the story with large headlines and the other newspapers wired to their correspondents to send more details at once. As I have said, I did not send any 'more details,' and this seems to be the correct place in which to say that newspapers and news agencies nowadays do not seem to be severe enough with correspondents who are careless with regard to the truth. At one time English newspapers were very proud of the fact that they never printed anything until they were reasonably certain of its accuracy. If any reporter or correspondent was not sufficiently careful, he was sacked. But now it does not seem to matter whether a man is careful or not. I think it is a great pity.

A few days before the expedition began to move, correspondents were informed that all was ready, and the names of those who were to be permitted to accompany the relief column with the British troops were posted up at British headquarters. I did not know this, till at the Club one day, a man said to me: 'I thought you were for the *Daily Telegraph* !'

'So I am,' I said.

'That's funny, because your name is up at headquarters not for the *Daily Telegraph* but for *Reuter's Agency*.'

Off I went to headquarters and there, true enough, I found I was down for Reuter. At that time I had in my pocket my pass, signed by General Gaselee in India, as correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*. So I went in and saw some staff officer who was sitting in state, and he said: 'Well, the list we put up came to us direct from Simla. I can't see what you have to grumble about; you have now a double chance of getting up to Pekin.' Later that afternoon I met a very angry man, and that was a correspondent, who had come up, I think, from Shanghai. I explained that it was not my doing, and as I saw him afterwards in Pekin, I imagine he was able to adjust matters for himself.

Two days before the expedition started, correspondents were informed that a junk on the river had been placed at their disposal for transport, and they would get nothing else. When they reached Tungchow, which is the nearest point on the river to Pekin, they would have to find their own transport. How pleased I was that I had my China cart and pony.

Some kind of a mess was formed amongst the correspondents, each of whom I think gave five or ten pounds towards furnishing the junk and laying in supplies. The military gave us a sepoy guard on the junk to see that the boatmen did not desert; very few attempted it because I think they felt they were

safer under a guard than if left on their own. I only saw that junk about twice on the way up, but on each occasion I was able to bring away a certain amount of tinned provisions as my share of the supplies on board. But the narrative is dragging. We should be on the move.

One afternoon we did start on the move, and were lucky enough to hit the trail of the British contingent. To those troops we stuck most of the way, watching their battles and camping in their camps. The first march was for only a few miles, but it took hours and hours, probably because the Japanese contingent had been directed to move across our front in order to get into a certain position before nightfall. The march had taken us through the deserted town of Tientsin, and it was still remarkable what a few people there were about, though I am pretty certain that no idle shooting of innocent non-combatants took place. The people were simply too frightened to return; those who stayed made a good thing out of it by looting their neighbours. Presently we passed the last picket. It was held by Russian troops, who sat about in unsoldierly attitudes and took no notice of the British troops. Thereafter the British had to send out scouts, and there were other long delays while pickets were being posted on the flanks, before we finally moved into camp for the night.

But it was not a camp proper; it was a bivouac and a cold one, because no fires were permitted. Worse than that, word was sent round that no smoking would be allowed and that anyone who lighted a match would be severely punished. These precautions were taken, we were told, because the enemy was only a few hundred yards away and numbered more than thirty thousand soldiers together with any number of Boxers. I think the British force at the time only numbered a few thousand. Moreover, we were told that shortly after midnight a Japanese column would pass through us and deploy in front of us to lead the attack. I think that very few of us slept that night; anyway everybody seemed to be awake when the Japanese came silently along. But I was amused to see all along the Japanese column little flickers of light. Whether the Chinese were in front or not, Japanese officers were smoking their cigarettes.

We must have dozed off after the Japanese had passed, but I was awakened at about five by the most startling, thunderous roar that I had ever yet heard. The Japanese attack had started, and all those thirty thousand Chinese rifles were being discharged at once; mostly high in the air. After the ear had become accustomed to the musketry and the fitful thuds of artillery one heard an additional sound, the swish, and swish and swish of countless bullets passing

overhead. Perhaps some of us were unnerved at first, but later on this battle that had started seemed no more deadly or dangerous than life is in the butts during a musketry competition. The Japanese must have reached their first objective quite easily, because shortly after this tremendous fire had started, the Indian troops were moved up.

There were no rules about war correspondents not being permitted into the front line, and Steer and I went where we pleased during that first battle. We passed the spot from where the Japanese attack had been launched, and there we saw the Japanese dead, perhaps thirty or forty. Amongst them was only one wounded man (to whom Steer gave a cigarette). The other wounded had been carried away to a field ambulance. While the Indian troops filed away into a field covered with high corn, we went to watch a British field battery in action. I think it was the 12th Field Battery from Jullundur. This battery had some men knocked out by a Chinese shell. Further along we found a couple of Japanese guns which looked like toys compared with the fifteen-pounders of the British. A Japanese officer, who spoke English, said we had come to a very dangerous spot and seemed to indicate that he would rather that we were not there. So back we went to where we had seen the Indian infantry deploy. We found that they had already extended

and were advancing up a railway embankment, apparently under heavy fire, because men were dropping and the others were taking as much cover as possible. Away on the left the embankment was being rushed by troops who later we found out were Americans. There seemed to be some Indians amongst them, and I was told later on that this mixed force was led by an officer named Climo, who later achieved great fame in India as a frontier soldier. He died quite recently. I suppose it was about midday before the whole of the embankment was captured and the battle was finally won. I know we clambered over the embankment and dropped down the other side, where there were remarkably few Chinese dead. There in a sort of grove the British troops re-formed and went to sleep. Yes, that is exactly what happened. Everybody was tired, since there had been no sleep the night before and because the excitement of battle induces an overpowering physical weariness after the struggle is over.

It will seem that my description of my first battle is rather vague, but I am relating just what I saw. The locality in which this action was fought was full of hollows and depressions, and everywhere there were crops into which troops disappeared. There was no bird's-eye view possible, and I could not say where the Russians were, or the French, or any troops except those immediately in front of

me. *There seemed to be no scheme in the battle; it just happened.*

Just as we were settling down for an enjoyable snooze three Europeans in a civil get-up rode furiously past us, making for Tientsin. We knew them by sight; they were French war correspondents and they were off to be first to put on the wires the news that the Allied forces had won the battle of Peitsang. We smiled as they hurried by, because we knew what apparently they did not, that it had been arranged that no news descriptive of the advance of the foreign troops would be accepted in any telegraph office unless it had first been censored in the field. These hustlers would have their ride for nothing. I suppose we slept for a couple of hours before the troops began to move again. I was able, during the course of the march that followed, to get a message, that I had scribbled hastily, censored by a British officer, who told me that if I could find the American headquarters I would possibly get it despatched, for the Americans were laying a field telegraph. I did find an American signal section of some kind and a signaller cheerfully took my message.

The march up to Peking was so continuous an effort, and the marching became so tedious, that I cannot think of it but as a single constant strain; my memory cannot separate the days, and it was



simply a case of on and on and on. We were aware that frantic appeals were coming from the Legations to the effect that their need was now desperate, and that the enemy was becoming bolder and bolder. Indeed, it was obvious that the Chinese would make every attempt to finish as quickly as possible with the Legations so that they might have all their forces available for stopping us at the gates of Peking.

But there were several actions on the way with a Chinese rearguard, I suppose, and with local Boxers. There was a place called, I think, Hosiwu, where, while we were going sullenly along the road, we suddenly came upon a wide plain. On the top of a little hillock, to our right, was a group of high staff officers. We rode up to them and I asked an officer what was afoot.

'Well,' he said, 'it seems to me and to all of us that there is going to be a cavalry battle. Look there.' I looked, and presently away on the right I could clearly distinguish a long stream of horsemen issuing from a hollow and galloping madly away.

I was able to guess at once that these people were Tartars. They carried long spears slung over their shoulders and were leaning forward on their ponies flogging them desperately. My informant added that the 1st Bengal Lancers, who were the only cavalry then with the British contingent, were

## THE RELIEF OF THE LEGATION

coming up fast and would be into the Tartars presently. But somehow the collision did not take place. It struck me then that I would not like to be a horseman ordered to charge into an enemy moving across my front. Naturally, if there were a collision I would be dismounted and the horse would probably fall too. The same thing would happen to the enemy. There is no point in a combat in which both combatants are killed. But I did see some Japanese mounted infantry, not at that time, but an hour or so later, charge madly along towards a body of Tartars who looked very much like the Tartars I had already seen, but in this case the Japanese deliberately halted when within a few hundred yards of the Tartars, dismounted, and opened a musketry fire which dropped a good few Tartars and their horses; the remainder fled. It struck me that this was a better method of dealing with enemy cavalry than charging at them in the orthodox helter-skelter manner. Why use a lance when you have a rifle?

But as I have said these incidents hardly relieved the monotony and weariness of the march. On, on, on. I am afraid that during the long hours of riding behind our baggage cart, relations between Steer and myself became rather strained. We started arguments about nothing at all. I think Steer was right in criticising the servant I had brought from India.

for he did nothing but sit in the cart. I will admit that he was a thoroughly bad servant, but I did not like Steer saying so, because Steer had no servant at all, or if he had one, I have no memory of him. My man was an ex-soldier, which made matters worse. Many people who have written about travels have devoted pages and pages to the shortcomings of their followers, so let me dismiss my follower with the remark that he was a bad lot.

In due course the allied troops arrived at the walled city of Tungchow, and Peking was only fifteen or twenty miles away.

We had been told at the headquarters of the Indian contingent that there would be a halt of one day at Tungchow, in spite of the urgent appeal for haste reaching us from Peking. The halt was necessary both to rest the troops and to enable the commanders to consult and make plans for the capture of Peking. Steer and I rejoiced greatly, of course, because a halt would enable us to clean up (we had not had a wash for three or four days), and give our animals a rest. I remember how I gloried in just sitting about in the sun, although it was a very hot sun, and doing nothing. We even saw a little fight in progress on the other side of the river. There was a junk lying there which was apparently full of rifles and ammunition. Some Chinese soldiers had been spotted boarding the junk and making

attempts to unload it. When fired upon they returned the fire, whereupon some Russians took up the challenge, and they ferried some troops across and attacked these Chinese from the rear. I do not suppose there were more than a dozen Chinese all told, so the affair was soon over. But it was interesting to watch, and the fact that the Chinese were unwilling to surrender proved that they had men amongst them of great courage.

It must have been about four in the afternoon, while we were still dreaming of going to sleep at about seven before we rose at dawn, that an English correspondent, whom I knew, but whose name I have forgotten, came riding by. 'Up, hounds,' he cried. 'Don't you know the troops are moving?' We did not know it, but the correspondent said that the Russians, after agreeing not to start till dawn next day, had already started, in order to be first into Peking and have the first chance of looting the Sacred City. These Russians, of course, had taken a lively share in the looting of Tientsin, and that explains their desire to be ahead of all the others to enter the greatest city in Asia.

There were signs of activity all along the river bank. I dashed off to where the Press junk was located and collected what stores I could. Then, rushing back, we got the horses ready and the cart prepared and followed the route which the correspondent

De"

had said the Russians had taken. They had got pretty far ahead, though, and we were unable to overtake them. Also, the other troops were not as quick as we were in getting off; naturally they had much more packing to do and all kinds of military arrangements had to be made.

So you can see us, that is to say Steer and myself and the other correspondent and my servant, in the cart, riding along a practically deserted road. Literally, after night had fallen, we rode for hours and hours without seeing a sign of any living person anywhere. The white and dusty ribbon of road lay in front of us, but there was nothing else. There were crops on each side and three or four times we passed through empty and deserted villages, not even a dog was to be seen. It was about two in the morning when we first heard the guns; as we rode on they became louder and louder. At first we thought these were Russian guns, but later on it dawned on us that we were listening to a bombardment by the Chinese of the Legations. The noise grew louder and louder as the night wore on. Presently Steer drew my attention to another sound. It was not a distant sound but close to us and on each side. Yes, there were people moving about in the crops. The other correspondent, who was carrying a rifle of some kind, wanted to fire a shot or two into the crops, because he said the people in

them were evidently Chinese who were watching us, but we persuaded him not to do anything rash.

Suddenly there came a harsh cry from twenty or thirty yards away in front, a strange sound to hear in that dark place: 'Who are you, answer quick!'

Somebody replied in a voice I could not recognise, 'We are English.'

The answer came: 'Halt where you are.' Then: 'Let one man come forward and explain.' I rode forward and explained to an officer standing in the middle of the road, just who we were. He said: 'Lucky for you that you answered so promptly because we were going to fire upon you thinking you were Chinese cavalry.'

And then I saw, extended along the road, a line of infantry, lying down. Steer and the other man came up and there were more explanations. The American officer said that his men had been told off as an escort to a supply column. They had been informed that the column had gone up the road, and that they were to follow and overtake it. What had apparently happened was that the column had not started when they started, and so, like ourselves, the Americans had followed a deserted road. The officer added that being now convinced that he had overshot his mark he was determined to stay where he was until the supply column came along.

We had half determined to follow his example

when there came a much louder and more continuous sound of battle from the north, and it struck us that the Russians were now engaged with the enemy and were battling their way into Peking. That decided us. We had to go on and see what was happening.

Telling the unspeakable servant with the cart to stay with the Americans and follow them when we had gone, we ourselves dashed off down the road. The noise of the firing was becoming louder and louder and it lured us on. Dawn had just begun to appear when we passed through quite a large village; a small town, in fact; but the main road was quite clear. There were dead men on the road, not many, but some of them had rifles and it was clear that an attempt had been made here to stop the march of the Russians.

When we were a mile or two out of the town the sky had so brightened that we were able to see more or less where we were. We saw about us broken country, intensively cultivated with vegetables, and there were trees dotted here and there, numerous enough to form, at a distance, a barrier which prevented us from seeing the city, which was then only a few miles ahead. At one point, when the firing seemed only a few hundred yards away, the nameless correspondent climbed a tree to see what he could see. He had only got half way up when an

exclamation burst from him: 'Come up here and see something wonderful.' It was an easy tree to climb, some species of oak, and I was soon up beside him; and there before me was a scene which took my breath away.

It was not so much the scene of battle that was so amazing, as the battlements and towers that rose in front of me. A scene almost from fairyland. No city was to be seen at all; this was the great outer wall of Pekin. On the top of the wall and running here and there between the towers were to be seen tiny figures and little puffs of smoke. Down below, almost under the wall, and indeed right under the wall, were hundreds of Russian soldiers in their white uniforms. They were keeping close to the wall so that the people above could not see them without leaning over at a dangerous angle. Some hundreds of yards away there was a field battery in action, and one could see the shells striking the top of the wall and destroying great chunks of it. Where the continuous roll of musketry came from we could not guess, but doubtless in some hollow or concealed in some field were two or three battalions of soldiers who kept up a steady fire at the wall. Further away, round the Legations, there was a continuous sound of another heavy battle.

Nothing would content us but to reach that wall,



and we galloped towards it across country as hard as we could. There were some obstacles in the way, and in avoiding them we got a new view of the wall and of the battle. That view showed us a big gate with two smaller ones on each side, and we also saw, amongst the Russians standing below, some scattered American uniforms.

I, personally, saw a wonderful sight. There was a big buttress coming down from a tower, and in the angle between the buttress and the wall an American soldier was climbing up like a cat-burglar. The great wall of Pekin is very old, and doubtless there were holes and crumbling bits which gave the soldier a foothold. But foothold or not, it struck me that the man was performing a wonderful feat of valour. Then, as we were still moving on, we saw one of the small gates at the side of the wall open, and the Russian and American soldiers dashing through. Later on I was told that the gate was opened by an American soldier who had preceded the one I saw doing his perilous climb, and who got down the other side somehow and opened the gate.

We trotted after the Russians and Americans and presently found that we were crammed in amongst a crowd of five or six hundred men clustered close together under the big arches of the gates. The enemy in the towers above, it was evident, were not able to see us but were able to get a sight of anybody

who ventured from under the arch. Ten or twelve Russians, lying dead in the open in front, showed what had been the fate of the men who had ventured outside the arch. It is to be noted that at this point there was a wide open space between the houses of the city and the wall. Some Chinese had evidently attempted to stop the Russians through the smaller gate – their bodies lay about under the arch, and no one had troubled to push them out of the way of the clustering and trampling soldiers. But more and more Russians came pouring through, and men on the outer fringe were being shoved into the open, whether they liked it or not. Then began a wild dash for the safety of the houses on the other side of the open space. Not many men dropped.

We were too far back to take any part in this rush but did not feel happy where we were because the Russians had fixed bayonets and we were in danger all the time of being jabbed in the eye or getting our horses stabbed. Presently enough men got away to make movement easy under the arch, and it must have been then that the great gate was opened somehow. As soon as it was open there was a cry, in Russian of course, but we easily understood it to mean something like 'Stand clear' or 'Get out of the way.' This cry was the result of the sight of an American battery coming down the road. The leading gun halted for a moment under the arch

together with an escort of infantry. Firing was still going on from the wall, and the Russians who had got amongst the houses were replying to it. Then I heard an American soldier say: 'They have hoisted a white flag. What shall we do?' There came a loud and steady reply from a mounted officer: 'Shoot at it.' It was then that I realised that a white flag did not necessarily mean that all firing was to be stopped at once. The white flag might easily be employed to stop fire while those who displayed it got clear away. But the battery did not attempt to open fire itself or take up a position to do so. Presently it moved forward and all the guns reached the other side with only a few men hit.

Suddenly the fire from the top of the wall ceased. Indeed all fire in this section of the battlefield stopped. Away in the distance there was still heavy firing, and we thought that further off there was a third battle raging. Perhaps the British or the Japanese troops were attacking another section of the wall.

But to us a strange thing happened, the same thing that had happened to the troops at Peitsang – we felt an overwhelming desire to sleep which must be satisfied at any cost. Russians and Americans were already flinging themselves on the ground, and dropping off, and we, putting our legs and arms through the reins of our ponies, also lay down.

Years afterwards I heard a man describing the battle of Omdurman, and he confirmed what I have said; how sleep attacks men who have just passed through the overwhelming excitement of a battle. We had no idea how many of the enemy were about; we hardly knew where we were; we had forgotten all about the necessity of getting to the Legations as fast as possible; all we wanted was sleep. It must be remembered, of course, that we had been marching all through the night and the excitement had been in a way continuous for over twelve hours.

Someone, more tough than the rest, must have waked in time, for when I felt a nudge and a tugging at my foot and looked at my watch, I found that after all we had not slept the whole day through. I cannot tell you exactly when we started to move again. I suppose the day was about half over. We followed in the wake of the Americans, who allowed the Russians to lead the way, because, as I was told, the Russians had found a Chinese whom they knew would show them the way to the Legations. It is all very well to say, 'March to the sound of the guns,' but that is not so easy when the sound is somewhere within a big city. It becomes confused; streets and houses distort it, and you may have to march many more miles than you might have done. I noticed during that march, not so much the absolute emptiness of the streets as the number of open spaces

inside the city. They were all intensively cultivated; there were crops in some and vegetables or orchards in others.

After what seemed to be many hours of moving there came an excited whisper from down the line: 'They have reached the Legations.' Men began to scurry. The Russians had apparently dashed forward and had lost all their cohesion, and the Americans were at the double. We did not scruple to canter past the soldiery, and so the three of us burst into an open space in front of which towered another wall.

There were men on top of the wall in white uniform; not Russian, but the clean white drill worn by British marines. Behind the wall were the Legations. I remember the first thought that struck me when I saw these marines was how clean and fresh they looked. Though they had been in great straits for food and had lived under the ever present fear of massacre by the Boxers, these soldiers had sufficient water with which to keep themselves clean, and probably time also to look after their personal appearance. We, on the other hand, during that first march, were not always in touch with the river, and there was so much hurry and so much to do that shaving and washing clothes was almost out of the question. We had grown accustomed to our own dirty faces and dirty uniforms.

Then we saw a field gun, a British one, I think, that was being brought up and levelled at a barred recess at the bottom of the wall over the top of which the marines were peering. This structure which looked like a gate was a heavy iron one. A shell was fired, and I wondered why the people in the Legations did not open the gate and let us in. There seemed to be a consultation round the gun after the shot had been fired, and while it was going on somebody let a big basket down the wall, tied to a rope. I saw a figure jump into the basket – the figure of a sepoy – and the basket was drawn up again. Then there was shouting from the crew of the gun and the people round the gate were ordered to stand clear. A second shot was fired, and that burst the gate. Such fragments of the gate as still stuck to the wall were soon pulled aside, and everybody made a rush, just like that other rush we had seen when the gate in the great outer wall was opened. It turned out that this gate was not a real gate at all; it was a great iron grating at the head of an enormous drain which led out of the Legation. The stout iron bars which had been placed against it merely represented the ordinary precautions one would take to prevent all kinds of foreign bodies entering the mouth of a sewer.

And there we were, Steer and the other correspondent and myself, riding like generals up the

slope. On both sides of us were cheering groups of the besieged, amongst whom there were many women and children and civilians. The bulk of these people were missionaries who had taken refuge in the Legation when the Boxer troubles began. They had not, I noticed, been able to keep themselves as trim and neat as the marines had, in fact some of them looked decidedly the worse for siege.

Somebody seized the reins of my horse, and I dismounted and was soon surrounded by a group of men and women. The first question a youngish man asked me was: 'What do they think of us in Europe?' And my reply, 'They think you are all dead,' for some reason or other caused a great deal of satisfaction. I suppose everybody likes to think he has participated in a big sensation. Then they asked me who I was. When I said that I was for the *Telegraph* they were disappointed, for being American, they would rather have had an American.

Steer and the other man had disappeared amongst other groups, and the Russians and Americans and the British troops were being marched off in various directions. An American woman, obviously a missionary, said that the British were winning all the way, and when I asked why, she said: 'Why, a Britisher was the first man to enter the Legations,' and then she showed me, scrawled up in chalk on a

wooden shed, these words: 'First man into the Legations. Sepoy Sunder Singh, 7th Rajputs.' So that was the sepoy I had seen climbing into the basket. It was clever of him to have the fact that he was the first man recorded, even though it was only in chalk. Anyway, I took the words down and have remembered them ever since.

An extraordinary reaction often follows the excitement of taking part in a great event. There was no doubt that this relief of the Legations was a historical affair of prime importance, for if the relief force had not succeeded in getting to Peking in time, there is no saying what the European nations, particularly the Germans, would not have done to China in their fury. But those taking part in the scene I have just described only felt a kind of reaction. Very well, the Legations had been relieved, the troops had entered, and the Boxers had fled. What to do next? That is what I felt and everybody round felt the same. What to do next? I asked somebody standing by if there was any place where I could stable my horse, and he led me to a range of stables where several rows of horses and mules were tethered. I found a place for my pony. There was some fodder in the trough and I left him there.

Then it struck me that it would be a good plan to attempt to get an interview with the British Minister



or somebody of importance in the Legations. I did find an official, but he must have misunderstood the purpose for which I was there, because he asked me to follow him and he led me on to a sort of tennis lawn, where twenty or thirty missionary families were camping, pointed to an open space, said: 'You can camp there,' and so left me.

Taking note of the spot I strolled forth, talking to various odd people, soldiers and others, who happened to be about. I wanted to find out how it was that the British troops and the British artillery had got to the Legations before anyone else, although they were probably the last to start. It appeared that they had taken a road which led them to a gate which was almost undefended. They had got there and marched straight through to the Legations. The Russians had overreached themselves; they had started early but had encountered fierce opposition. The unlucky Japanese, taking a third route, had come up against the bulk of the Chinese soldiers and indeed did not get into the city that day.

In the course of these walks and talks I came across Steer again and told him about the camping-place on the lawn. He did not seem to think much of it and said that it would be better for us to have a look for our baggage and so on. But where were we to look? This servant of mine had not followed the

Americans as far as I could gather. He might have found some British troops, but the bulk of them were camping for that night some miles away, where exactly, nobody knew.

In due course Steer and myself found ourselves in a room with a large group of student interpreters. They were eating a meal, and we ate a biscuit or two with them but refused the meat, which was mule. 'You have relieved us all right,' said one, 'but what about relieving the inner man?' I realised then that, though the troops had come in, no supply train had, and that the relieved Legations would have to feed us unless food were found in some way or another.

How it came about I really do not know, but we were present at a sort of dinner at which important people sat. There were dishes of mule flesh and, if you please, an abundance of champagne, but very little else. Toasts were drunk and all was merry and bright.

It was not quite dusk when the meal was finished, and Steer and I, hearing firing in the distance, wandered outside the Legation wall, through the sewer gate. Then we felt very tired and sat down with our backs to the wall. Suddenly there came a spitting sound and a fat bullet hit the ground between us. There was light enough for us to see, and looking up, we found, at the spot where British

marines had been earlier in the day, an enormous diabolical face peering down at us. The marines had gone and the Chinese soldiery had come back. And now, looking down the wall and in the far distance where we could see long bits of the inner wall, we saw flashes of fire. Apparently odd Chinese soldiers had got back to the wall and were now sniping at anybody who looked like a foreigner. In the open space in front of us American soldiers had camped for the night.

We got up from where we were, for we seemed to be too close entirely to the snipers, and I was talking to an officer when something, which was not a bullet, flicked past. The American picked it up, and, if you please, it was an arrow. The Banner-men were out at last. And to encourage myself I remembered all I had heard and read about their ferocities. The American soldier was not disturbed and said something about Red Indian methods of warfare being out of date. He kept the arrow in order to prove how primitive the Chinese were in their methods.

We got a drink of something hot out of those Americans and then went back to the shadow of the wall, where we dropped off to sleep and slept soundly all through the night. When we woke next morning there were our friends of the 9th U.S. Infantry busy round a fire. I do not know whether

## RELIEF OF THE LEGATION

other troops would have provided a couple of persons who looked like tramps with hot coffee in the morning; but the U.S. Infantry did. Then, forgetting our duties as correspondents, and all about our baggage, and not hearing any sounds of strife, we went out for a stroll.

First we walked along by the side of the wall, and remember at one place we came across a number of dead horses, not Chupa ponies, but the big fine horses that would belong to a field battery. I wonder what tragic event had taken place there. It rather looked as if a British field battery had been in action there and had its horses shot down. Further on we saw a few Chinese dead, but not many, and there were no signs of any soldiers, dead or wounded, belonging to the allied troops. I rather think that these Chinese walls, though heavily manned to begin with, had never inspired enough confidence in the defenders, such as modern fortifications do, to enable them to shoot with any degree of accuracy. Besides, it is to be noted that in those days the Chinese Provincial armies, though provided with a certain number of modern rifles, never did any musketry in the sense of shooting at targets. I believe that Chinese officers thought it a waste of ammunition to allow any practice.

Finally Steer and I decided to leave the open space outside the inner wall and to penetrate into the

city itself. We were, at first, in a region of mean houses, so mean, indeed, that I do not think the population had anything to fear from the invaders. The quarter was too poor to allow any prospects of loot. Still, there was nobody about; at least in the streets; there might, of course, have been people behind the barred doors, and I now think that there were thousands of them cowering in fright because of the monstrous tales that they had heard about the ferocity of the foreign devils. But presently we came into what was apparently a main thoroughfare. We had not quite entered it when my companion suddenly caught hold of my arm and drew me into the shelter of an overhanging doorway. 'Look there,' he said. We peeped cautiously out and saw the head of a great column of Chinese marching with some sort of regularity and carrying spears, bows and arrows, swords and other weapons of that class. Many of the men were very old, and some were not men at all but children. They wore heavy clothes under a kind of wadded helmet with earflaps and looked very Mongolian and fierce. These were the Bannermen.

## THE LOOTING OF PEKIN

These were the men who should have formed the Imperial Guard. Every man of them was drawing a good salary and had no duties to perform except that of protecting the royal family in time of danger. But the whole organisation had fallen to pieces, and the members of it were sunk in sloth and vice. I was told that some of the younger men with finer instincts had refused to draw any pay or pension and had gone off to seek their fortunes outside Peking. But the remainder were there, and when the Empress Dowager was really in danger they were at last roused into activity. They did not make any kind of a move until the Allied forces were actually at the gates of Peking. Then, stirred by ancestral memories, they unearthed their obsolete arms and sallied forth to do what they could. I mentioned that arrow which must have come from a Bannerman. Later on I heard from others that, at certain points for several nights, whole sheafs of arrows were discharged, from behind the walls and other hiding-places, at foreigners passing by.

About the men that I actually saw: they were not marching but trotting in that peculiar way which Chinese affect when on a long march. Their bodies were bent forward, and this lot had their faces turned as they trotted in the direction opposite to that in which we were. Just as well, perhaps, for if they had seen us and realised that there were only two of us, I would not be telling this story now. Presently, my companion and I felt so secure that we talked to each other and peeped out more boldly. From time to time an actual banner appeared amongst the ranks. It was not the old dreadful banner of a head on a pike that the Manchus had once carried. These were proud yellow flags, richly embroidered, and some of them bore Chinese characters upon them, probably denoting the section of Bannermen to which they belonged. I would have dearly loved to have got hold of one of those flags.

In those days I did not know how to compute the numbers of soldiers by the time they take to pass a given point. But I did know that the normal person was apt to exaggerate numbers, so I was not surprised, when I said to my companion that there must have been quite four or five thousand Bannermen, that he should stare at me. 'Four or five! There must have been twenty or thirty thousand.'

'We'll let it go at that. Whatever their numbers

## THE LOOTING OF PEEKAY

they were off somewhere in a great hurry. Later on we knew enough about the situation to realise that these men must have been following in the train of the Empress Dowager, who had fled the night before, and whose bodyguard they were. Presently, we thought we had better go back to the Legations. I was anxious to get some messages away, and I felt that I should really do something about my servant and baggage. It was easy enough to find our way back to the Legation wall and follow it up till we found the famous sewer entrance. There were other exits and entrances, of course, into the city on the further side. I found no one in the camping-place which had been allotted to me, but came across a supply depot for British troops which had just been established there.

I must explain here that British correspondents, before they were given any kind of passport or licence to go with Indian troops, had to place with the Supply Department a deposit of 1,000 rupees. This was to pay for any rations or transport they might require.

And here is another fact which will rather surprise the young soldier of to-day. Officers of the Indian Army in those days were not given free rations in the field. They had to feed themselves, though the Indian Government graciously allowed them to buy rations from the Supply Department Commissariat.



## 5. A ROVING COMMISSION

As it was called. Transport, too, could be hired if carts and mules were available. Otherwise, officers had to get their animals where they could. I had, on several occasions, drawn rations from the Supply Department, and on this occasion got a good stock of bully beef tins and biscuits. Indeed, I was told that if I came later I might even get fresh bread.

Laden with my provisions in a sack I went back to my so-called camp. There I found some children and their mother under a sort of rough make-up tent, and they were quite prepared to look after these things, particularly when I said they could have as much out of the rations as they cared to have. I still remember the cry of the woman when she said, 'I do hope it is not mule. Mule meat is making the children ill.' I assured her it was not mule and helped her right off to open a tin of bully beef. This had to be done with a chopper and hammer because those old tins were very heavily soldered and consisted of heavy tin. The modern tin-opener would be of no use in dealing with those formidable containers.

Then I went out again, looking for some kind of telegraph office, which the Americans might have set up somewhere. I found one at last, and the signaller there presented me with a form and a pencil and when I had finished the writing took my message with a smile. I asked him if other

## **THE LOOTING OF PEKIN**

correspondents had come along. He smiled again and said: 'No, you are the first.' That seemed rather strange because I knew that among the American correspondents were some of the most wide-awake men in the newspaper world at that time. However, I was satisfied that I had done my duty and so turned with an easy conscience to see what I could see.

At first I had to find my pony. I found it, and also, I am sorry to say, a man in a black coat preparing to saddle it and mount and be off. When I told him that was my pony he was not a bit abashed but said he would take another. There were several others about in the stable, so I suppose he got his ride.

I found a sort of main road leading out of the Legations towards what I suppose was the most important street in Peking. Lots of people were streaming out along this road, soldiers, civilians in khaki, and a curious and wildly excited crowd of Chinese wearing straw hats, round the ribbon of which was printed in bold lettering the word 'Christian.' I suppose this was to save them from the foreign devil. You can guess what these people were pouring out of the Legations for. They were out for loot.

There is this to be said about the looting of Peking, that certainly most of the stuff taken out of

the shops and private houses was taken by Chinese. In the main street there were numbers of Chinese about, dashing into shops and houses and coming back laden with all kinds of things. They had apparently lost all fear of foreign devils. I did not think that any of these people were owners of the property they were carrying off. On that day there was so much loot and such a few people to take it that, just as at Tientsin, there was no fighting for the possession of any given article. Later on, there was fighting, because the looters, whether troops or civilians, began to concentrate on certain houses and certain shops.

That entertaining book, *Indiscreet Letters from Peking*, gives a very graphic description of the scenes which took place during the first two or three weeks after the relief of the Legations. I myself saw a great building with iron bars and shutters being attacked by Russian soldiers, who were evidently on their own and who were without any officers. Some were firing at the upper windows and others were battering at the massive wooden doors. Fire was returned from the upper windows, and one realised that this place was being defended, and pretty stoutly. The Russians at the door were being assisted by a mob of Chinese, very hard and desperate-looking men, and there were women with them also, screaming and shaking their fists.

## THE LOOTING OF PEKIN

The Chinese finally found a big wooden beam which they used as a battering ram. They burst the big door open and they and the Russians broke in. There was a European by my side also watching, a civilian of some kind, carrying a gun over his shoulder, and I asked him what this place was: he told me that it was a pawn-shop. He added: 'You will presently see the Russians coming out again. There is nothing there that they will care to have.' I asked what there was to entice the Chinese, and he explained that this pawn-shop made a feature of lending money on winter clothing and furs. 'The Russians,' he said, 'don't seem to know what winter in North China is, or perhaps they depend on their army supplies. But these poor Chinese know what it means to be without wadded clothing or blankets or furs in the winter. And winter is not so far off.' This man was quite right.

The soldiers came out of the building very soon, carrying nothing, but when the Chinese emerged each man or woman was staggering under a huge bundle. I noticed that in many cases a man carrying a bundle got a kick or a thump from somebody in the street who took the bundle and made off with it. Naturally scuffles followed. There were fist-cuffs, boxing in short. Later on these scuffles for loot were going to take the most serious form; weapons would be employed and there would be

wounded and dead men in the streets. Robbers robbed robbers.

This narrative would be rather dull, I think, if I made an attempt to describe the events of the next few weeks in any kind of serial order, that is to say, day by day. I do not remember them day by day myself, and the impressions that remain with me, though vivid enough, do not follow each other in any kind of sequence. I imagine that is the same with most memories, and the people who describe their days and nights during a time of crisis have to resort, from time to time, to documentary evidence; thus making their narratives, unless they happen to have genius, stodgy and prim.

To say that those few weeks were a nightmare would be quite incorrect. They were immensely exciting, and that is, I think, the very best way of describing my own memories of them. One day, penetrating into the city farther than usual, I found myself in a broad street. The usual scenes of looting were going on, but presently, as I moved up the street, I found it blocked with a mass of vehicles of every description. There was the inevitable China cart, and there were hundreds and hundreds of bullock carts, open carriages, a few camel carts and that curious kind of two-wheeled contraption which in India would be called a tumtum. In many cases animals were still standing within the shafts. There

were also large numbers of sedan chairs which had been abandoned by their bearers. I followed this block for quite a distance, almost a mile I should think, and then I came to a gate very much like the gate by which we had entered Peking. It now became evident that these vehicles and sedan chairs had been stuck there by a jam near the gate. Obviously I was looking at the tail end of the concourse of vehicles that must have followed in the wake of the Empress Dowager when she took to flight. I imagine that when the vehicles became absolutely jammed together some means were found of releasing the animals that had been drawing them, and I suppose many people then continued their flight on horseback. Mixed up amongst these carts and things were a few Chinese, peering into the interior of the carriages or pushing and struggling in order to get away such mules and animals as were still between the shafts. I must add that all round these carriages and on the pavement were strewn articles of clothing, cooking utensils and other household treasures. Some of them, I suppose, were taken out by these looting Chinese and thrown away, though one would think that lots of the clothing, being of silk, would have a value.

Perhaps it should be said here that if the army that had relieved Peking had been a bit larger and better equipped it would have been able to chase the

10 THE BOYING COMMISSION

Empress Dowager, disperse her followers and make her a prisoner. A suggestion of this sort, I think, was made, but you have to remember that at that time the total number of foreign troops in the city was no more than thirteen thousand. It would have been unsafe to weaken this force by detaching a large portion of it for any purpose.

Pekin had the reputation of being the largest city in Asia. There were those who said it had at that time a population of over seven million people. I have no idea of the extent of the city, but it was enormous, and the foreign troops were a mere drop in the ocean of humanity. In the first days, when the city was suffering from panic, the greater part of this population did not venture into the streets, but day by day more showed themselves there, and not all were out looting. They were ordinary people whose homes had not been visited by foreigners. One does not wish to exaggerate the looting. It did go on day after day, and the rougher element among the Chinese participated in it in larger and larger numbers. Still, the city was so enormous that big portions of it certainly never suffered in any way.

Here is another point that I observed about looting. After a while the troops in general realised what I had felt in Tientsin. What are you going to loot, once the big shops and places have been gutted? What is there in a private house that you can take

away and put in your pocket? Possessions like jewels and money are on the persons of the owners, they are not left lying about. There is clothing in plenty, and what else? Ornaments? Clocks? Soon you find there is nothing else, unless you want to roll up heavy carpets, put kitchen utensils into a pillow and carry a sofa on your head. There is, literally, nothing you can take from a private dwelling.

After a time the troops grew tired of going out and returning to quarters with bundles of stuff which was of little value. When I use the expression 'troops' I should add that the troops of one of the Allied Powers did not participate in the looting. I am going to say British? No, I am not. British troops did loot, though their looting was not accompanied, as was the case with the Russians, by indiscriminate shooting. The one nation that did not loot were the Americans. That seemed a strange thing to me, who had the idea that American discipline was not very strict. It may or may not be strict, but the officer commanding the American forces, General Chaffee, was a resolute man with a character somewhat like that of 'Stonewall' Jackson. He said there was to be no looting, and however his soldiers may have hungered to follow the example of others, they dared not disobey him. This action of the Americans at that time placed the



## **A ROVING COMMISSION**

**American people very high in the estimation of the troops of other Powers.**

The people besieged in the Legations were as bad as the troops, with some exceptions of course, because many of them were missionaries. But the Chinese, who called themselves 'Christians' on their straw hats, looted as much as any. They would go out empty-handed and return to the Legation staggering under bundles. I think it was the British Minister who first made a move against looting, and in combination with the officers of the Legations, British officers issued orders that indiscriminate looting was to cease and that any loot already collected was to be brought into the Legations and there sold by auction. The funds collected would be, later on, distributed from some kind of a common fund. I do not know how much money these auctions fetched, but it could hardly have been a large sum. I cannot believe that any soldier who had got anything valuable surrendered it, particularly if it was the kind that could be secreted in kits. There were stories told of jewels and things of that kind, held by private soldiers and later sold in Europe for enormous sums of money. I do not believe these stories.

But while the British gradually withdrew from the looting orgies that were taking place, other people still continued. It was a kind of madness.

## THE LOOTING OF PEKIN

which took the form of destruction; fires were breaking out, and one saw furniture being flung out of high windows and rifles jammed into china ware, and indiscriminate, wanton despoiling everywhere. And as I have said, the Chinese themselves were getting bolder and wilder. Things were getting pretty bad when somebody came into the city and restored order.

Before referring to the general introduction of discipline into the reign of chaos, which, confined at first to a few quarters at Peking was gradually extending to the whole city, I should mention the queer episode of the Catholic Fathers who were besieged by Boxers in a cathedral in the heart of the city. When the troubles first started these fathers refused to leave the cathedral compound in order to take refuge in the Legations. They were sent a small guard (of French marines I think) and all the time the Legations were besieged they were besieged also by Boxers.

These stout priests should have been relieved on the day when the Legations were relieved, but everybody forgot all about them for a couple of days or more, till a message came from them to enquire when they were to be relieved. Then there were long discussions between the various commanders as to who should do the relieving. The others seemed to be agreed that the Russians

## **ARROWING COMMISSION**

should, because they had the most troops. The Russians had some objection or other, but I rather think that what counted most with them was the fact that their troops were too busy engaged in looting to be collected for the purpose of relieving a few priests. I was told that the discussion was put an end to by General Chaffee, who had not more than eight or nine hundred men, saying: 'Nonsense. I'll go and knock these Boxers out in a few hours.' So he did. A couple of guns and two companies of infantry relieved the fathers and so put an end to what was really a great scandal.

But let us now get to Count von Waldersee. The German contingent was just beginning to land at Tientsin when the Legations were relieved. They formed quite the largest body of troops sent to China by any of the Powers, and they were commanded by an officer of very high rank, a Field Marshal. Before the contingent left it had been arranged amongst the European Powers that Count von Waldersee was to have supreme command of all the allied forces in China. There were, of course, many grumbles, particularly on the part of British officers who did not see why they should come under the command of a German. In another and greater war the objection of British soldiers to foreign control of any kind nearly led to disaster which might have meant an end of the Empire. In

## THE LOOTING OF PEKIN

this smaller war the fact that somebody was put in control of everybody saved a minor disaster, for with the arrival of the German Field Marshal order was restored in Peking.

The first thing that was done was to break up the city into spheres of influence. The troops of various nations were allotted various parts in which they had to maintain order, and looting was not only forbidden, but it was announced that people found looting would be shot. Troops understood the meaning of this order, because in the army when it has been declared that a certain offence is punishable by death it is generally followed by death. The order was explained to the Chinese, but they did not believe it until they found that men breaking into houses were actually shot by patrols. I firmly believe that the action of Count von Waldersee saved the relief force from being itself besieged, for some of the troops were absolutely out of hand and the Chinese were recovering from their fright. Many of the Russians were simply wandering about the city and never returning to their quarters. I was told that one Russian battalion had not a single man in the rank and file left. Their buglers went about the city sounding the 'Recall,' but no one answered. With the introduction of order life at Peking became normal.

It may be asked where I was living all these days.

PC

## **ROYING COMMISSION**

I have mentioned the camp on the tennis lawn. But was I there all the time? And what did I do for food? Well, the fact is that I looted nothing less than a Manchu mansion. There was nobody living in it, so I and another correspondent took up our quarters there. I drew my rations from the British commissariat sometimes, and at other times we were able to buy what we wanted in the way of food from Chinese and others, and I remember getting for a small coin from a Japanese soldier a large basket of delicious Chinese sweetmeats. It was not so easy to feed our animals. There was a large grass compound at the back of the mansion, and there we left them to graze when we were not using them. These Manchu ponies will live on anything. They are hardly ever given any grain and pick up what they can when there is grazing about. At other times they seem to do without food and still remain fat.

About twice a week I would sit down and write a long despatch to my newspapers. So would the other man, an American. Once or twice he asked me to take his despatch for him to the telegraph office which the Americans had opened. On one occasion he asked me to read his despatch before I took it with me. I did so and was amazed beyond words. It described how, during the march to Peking, the force had one day arrived before a large

## THE LOOTING OF PEKIN

town which was almost entirely inhabited by Christians. When the head of the column reached the town it was met by a large body of missionaries and their converts, mounted on asses and camels. They were clad in white and were singing psalms. Describing the scene the correspondent mentioned palm trees and the general effect of the story was to create, in the minds of the readers, an impression of a tropical country.

'You can't possibly mean this seriously,' I said.

'Of course I mean it seriously. What do you think? Isn't it a good story?'

'It's a — lie,' I said. 'There is no Christian city, and we met no missionaries riding camels and clad in white. In fact there is only one camel in this part of Northern China, and that is the camel which carries the baggage of the Russian General.'

'You take that message, my boy. I will get great credit for it in the States.'

So I took the message, and it was when handing the two messages in that a great and sudden fear overtook me. The soldier who received them was strange to me and he took them with a great grin. I asked him if he was getting many and he said, 'Yes, lots and lots of them.'

'You seem rather pleased about it,' I said.

'Yes,' he said. 'It is funny.' But he did not tell me why.

## **A ROVING COMMISSION**

The thought came : Supposing none of these messages that I had been writing had really been forwarded at all. A single telegraph line would in any case be congested by official messages. Apart from the messages sent in the interests of the troops, the Legations would be consulting every day with their respective headquarters in Europe. Press messages would come last, and would probably not go at all. I hastened back to my mansion with my fear. The other man was still there and I told him what I thought. At first he was inclined to think I was talking nonsense, but later on he seemed to come round to my view. We did not quite know what to do about it, till the thought struck me that I should go back to Tientsin and enquire at the cable office there whether my messages, or any messages, indeed, were being forwarded to newspapers. I dashed off to British headquarters and was told that a convoy for Tientsin was leaving such and such a spot next day. I could go with it if I liked. The convoy was to consist of missionary families that were being evacuated to Tientsin.

I was not to return to Peking.

## BACK FROM THE FRONT

The convoy was composed of fifty or sixty China carts and perhaps a hundred and fifty or two hundred missionaries, men, women and children. The escort consisted of Indian cavalry, and the officer commanding it was a subaltern who evidently did not wish to leave Peking, for he was very disgruntled. Luckily, I had thought of getting a sort of permit to join this convoy or he would probably have not allowed me to do so. Anyway, off we started. I quite forget whether we were two days on the journey or whether we got down to Tungchow that same evening. It was a wearisome journey, very dusty, nobody had much to eat, and all the children were cross and tired.

I hate sitting or riding in these China carts. They are very awkwardly balanced, and the driver has to sit on the shaft, with his legs dangling. Next time I have to ride in a China cart I will certainly have a pair of stirrups made to ease my feet. The Chinese driver sits sideways on the shaft, a thing that the average European cannot do without running the risk of falling under the wheels.



## A ROYING COMMISSION

Some of the missionaries seemed quite comfortable reclining anyhow inside the cart with their baggage; but most of the men walked, like me. I had some conversation with them and was surprised to learn that most of them were quite prepared to go back to the mission stations from which they had fled. They said that the Chinese were accustomed to periodical fits of excitement; that it was always known when such a period was coming, and one could then get out of the way. Certainly, they added, this Boxer business was a much more violent thing than they had anticipated. Yet it would pass. Then they would go back and repair their mission dwellings and start work again. Chinamen, they averred, were ordinarily good, honest, decent fellows, and they liked them, and the Chinamen respected the missionaries in return.

At one point during the march, we had to climb a rather stiff bank; a canal of some kind had been cut across the road. Anyway, my cart upset. Three or four sowars of the escort who were on the spot came forward to help me to put the cart right, signalling to the convoy to halt while this was being done. The officer in charge rode up to see why the convoy had been delayed, and while the horse and cart were being lifted up he told the sowars to stop helping me. I said that without their help I could

## BACK FROM THE FRONT

not get the cart up. To this he replied: 'That is your business. It is certainly not the business of the escort to assist with the baggage of the people being convoyed.' Naturally, I thought this quite wrong and said so. Hot words passed, of which the upshot was that some of the missionaries and their servants, overhearing, came forward and did what the sowars were forbidden to do.

Later on there was another unpleasant passage. The convoy had halted for rest and refreshments and it happened that my cart was, at that moment, on a very awkward slope and was again liable to upset. I therefore drew it aside out of the line. The officer came up again and asked me what I meant by breaking the line. I pointed out that I could not have kept my place without the risk of the cart upsetting again. He said: 'Go back to your place.' I said: 'I won't.' It had to be left at that because the only thing the officer could do would be to resort to violence. When the order came to march on, I got in my place again, but I felt pretty certain that if I continued with the convoy there would possibly be trouble some day on the march and I would be left deserted somewhere without an escort. I determined that when we got to Tungchow I would try and get a passage on a junk down the river. There were certain to be many craft of various kinds going up and down.

## **A ROVING COMMISSION**

Luck was waiting for me at Tungchow, because there I met a consular officer, named Jenkins, who had a biggish boat, and he was going down to Tientsin. He readily agreed to take me on board, especially when he learned that I could talk Hindustani. He had an escort of three sepoys, but he could not make himself understood by them although he talked fluently enough to the Chinese crew. I left my horses and cart at Tungchow, making a present of them to the Chinese owner of the house at which I stayed that night. Next morning we were off.

The Pei-ho is not very broad between Tientsin and Tungchow, and for most of the time we hugged either one bank or the other, so that it was quite possible to see what the country was like, and nearly the whole way down it was one enormous desolation. Somehow the shocking nature of the scenes that I had witnessed in Peking did not seem to me so outrageous as the sight of the countryside laid waste. All this part of China must have been densely populated, and I imagine that the homes of the people for miles around were on the banks of the river. After all, it was the river, and not the road up which the army had passed, which had for untold generations carried the traffic in that part of the world.

All along the side of the river were the hulks of junks that had been burnt, and we were always

## BACK FROM THE FRONT

bumping up against vessels which had been sunk. The crops on each side were trampled down and in a hopeless condition. All the villages were mere skeletons of houses; trees had been felled apparently for no reason at all. It was particularly distressing to see the number of cattle that had apparently been wantonly killed; at several points we saw the skinned carcasses of pigs that had been killed and half eaten. I think that a good deal of this destruction was caused by Boxers and the Chinese soldiery that had been camped along both banks of the river. These people had been there for some weeks, apparently believing that the Allied attacks would come up the river. Then panic had seized them and they had fled. I do not know whether there was any severe fighting in this part. But I won't stress this aspect of the journey. Most people to-day can imagine what it was like. There have been enough pictures of the horrors of war, and I do not suppose that frightfulness in North China was very different from the frightfulness the world saw later on in Europe.

At every ten or twelve miles down the river, sometimes on this bank, and sometimes on the other, were small posts of soldiers. A good many of these, I found, were held by British troops. I think that they were men of a regiment from Hong Kong who were left behind because the regiment

## A ROVING COMMISSION

possessed very little transport of its own. Sometimes people shouted at us from these posts to enquire who we were and why we were not showing a flag. This question was asked so persistently that Jenkins decided that we must hoist some kind of a flag on the mast. Cloth was found somewhere, and presently we had a red, white and blue flag which we put up. The stripes were longitudinal, this making it like no other flag in the world. The morning after we had put it up we passed a launch coming up the river and crowded with French soldiers. A man, leaning over the stern, mockingly shouted from the launch, 'What kind of flag is that?'

To this Jenkins, who was in a bad temper that morning, replied, 'That is the English tricolor, my lord. It has been seen often enough in France.'

The two vessels had got some distance apart before the Frenchman found a voice, and then we could not hear what he said. So the honours remained with Jenkins.

One night we had an experience which was rather startling. It was getting dusk when we went past a Japanese post. The Japanese kept on shouting something at us, but neither of us could understand what they said. Then, to my surprise, one of the sepoys said that he knew what they were saying, and I said, 'How can you know? You cannot speak the

## BACK FROM THE FRONT

language of Japan.' He said that he knew because he gathered what was being said from the signs made by the Japanese.

'Tell us,' I said.

'They say that we should not go any farther if we desire to be alive in the morning.'

'Do they also say what there is to be frightened about?'

'Yes. Mosquitoes.'

We smiled at this and went on. We were thinking that it was about time to halt for the night when we entered the mosquito belt. And we found that the sepoy was right. Presently the air was full of mosquitoes, and really full, masses and masses of them. At first we thought we would run the gauntlet, but finally we decided to halt for the night and camp on the bank after lighting fires, the smoke of which might keep the mosquitoes away. As the boat was close into the bank and the smoke of the fire which we lighted drifted over it, I thought I might as well try and sleep on the boat as anywhere else, but Jenkins and the three sepoys decided to sleep as close to the fire as possible. The Chinese crew stayed on the boat. They seemed to be immune.

Sleep must have come to me, for the next thing I remember was a vague shouting from the bank and then seeing the bank slipping away. The boat

was adrift. The shouting was from Jenkins and the sepoys, who were running along the bank. Jenkins, who spoke Chinese of course, was shouting to the crew to steer the boat into the bank, but they would not. Then the sepoys began to fire at the boat. The Chinese on board became panic-stricken and sought refuge in the boat below the water line. However, I groped my way to the rudder and without being anything of a boatman I was able to steer the vessel into the bank, where Jenkins and the sepoys boarded her. The crew were hauled out and were ordered to take the boat back to the spot where the fires had been lit, to collect such possessions as had been abandoned there when the chase began.

Whether one of the crew had slipped the knot which tied the boat to a tree or whether the knot had been badly made, it is impossible to say. Anyway the crew swore that they had nothing to do with the boat getting adrift.

In the midst of this excitement we forgot all about the mosquitoes. Perhaps they were only active for a few hours, or perhaps we were near the edge of the belt. I do not remember being troubled by them again. I often think of what would have been my fate had not Jenkins or one of the sepoys discovered what had happened. It seemed to me likely that the Chinese crew, having once got clean

away from Jenkins and the escort, would have tossed me overboard and then joined the many unattached craft that were making use of the river. Most of the Chinese employed on the river by the troops and for the purposes of the war were impressed men. Numbers, as I know, were merely townspeople, seized for the occasion and made to work the boats. So the crew of this boat probably did not have any particular reason to love us. I think that the British paid the men they impressed, and the Americans certainly did, but the others just as certainly did not.

One morning, while we were drifting down the river, we heard a persistent calling from the bank. A young Chinaman was calling to us and following the boat. Jenkins, after listening to him for a while, said to me: 'That young man certainly belongs to some very good family. He is speaking the purest Mandarinese, and you notice how expensively he is dressed.'

'What does he say?'

'He is imploring us to take him on the boat, because he is afraid of being killed by Boxers or Allied troops.'

'Why isn't he afraid of being killed by us?'

'He says that he knows we are English, and he has credentials which will prove that he is friendly to the English.'



## **A ROVING COMMISSION**

**"Then why don't you take him on board?"**

**'Yes, I will,'** said Jenkins, and he stopped the boat and the man came on board. He was very pale and frightened. Over his silk garments he wore a richly embroidered robe, and he carried in one hand a bundle. After expressing his gratitude to Jenkins he went forward and sat amongst the crew. He refused anything to eat, saying that he had recently fed. But I think that some tragic scene which he must have witnessed had unhinged his mind. He kept muttering to himself. Then, suddenly, he drew his cloak tightly over his head and jumped overboard. He did not come up again. It was a clear case of suicide. The crew were on the point of opening his bundle when Jenkins ordered them to bring it to him. He opened it, and it was found to contain clothing. The costume was that of an average Chinaman, and with it were other garments which would ordinarily have only been worn by a coolie. The young man had evidently provided himself with two disguises.

We ran into Tientsin in the middle of one day, and Jenkins said that we would stop at a spot where I could hire a boat or a cart to take me to some point close to the Astor Hotel, which he thought would then be open.

I have not mentioned my servant. I don't know where he was during the mosquito episode, but he

## BACK FROM THE FRONT

appeared now hugging a bundle of his own. I think we got a cart of some kind into which I put whatever kit I had and my servant put his precious bundle. We went down to the Astor Hotel. Behold, it was open, and very glad I was to get a bath and change into the one set of things that I had not yet worn. Boy Number One, that is to say, the Chinese head waiter of the hotel, told me that there was a barber's shop around the corner, and for the first time for several weeks I emerged from the hotel as a respectable looking individual.

I enquired where the cable office was and found that to get to it would involve me in a journey which might occupy a few hours. So I put off the visit until the morrow.

On the morrow I found that the office was not as far as I had been told. When I got to it I asked to see the manager and enquired about messages to Europe and India. Then, to my horror, I learned that not a single message from me had reached the office. I had feared that this would be the case, as I explained before, but there was always a hope, and now the last hope had gone. And worse was to follow, because, although my messages had not gone, there was a message for me from my editor in Calcutta which said that as the Legations had now been relieved there was no purpose in my staying in China and that I was to return. Naturally, I read

into this recall a kind of dismissal, at least from war-correspondence; but the order to return was quite clear, and I went back to the hotel in a rather doleful mood.

Suddenly a great thought struck me. Was it really too late? The cable office had refused to take any messages from me then, on the grounds that no arrangements had been made for C.O.D. messages, but from something that had been said I rather thought that the bulk of the other correspondents must be in the same predicament as myself; their messages from the field had probably like mine not got any farther, and, in any case, they would be held up at the cable office.

My recall, I thought, might be a blessing in disguise. There was always the post. What if I sat down to write furiously a connected story of the relief of the Legations and of what happened afterwards, and sent the whole thing off by post from various ports my ship called at? Perhaps it would not be too late. I hurried to British headquarters first, to see what ships were leaving and how soon I could get a passage. My luck was in. I could go down to Taku in a steam launch that was leaving early next morning, and catch a transport that was due to sail on the day after. I went back to the hotel full of my idea and worked out that if the transport sailed as arranged I should be in Shanghai

## BACK FROM THE FRONT

in about ten or twelve days and from there my story would go to England by the first mail.

My hopes were slightly dashed that evening, because when I went back to the hotel I found four or five other correspondents there. They said to me that they were tired of staying in Peking where there was nothing doing and that they were all off to Japan on a short holiday. I concluded immediately that they were not on a holiday, but they were going to cable their stories from Japan. The only solace I had was in the thought that they might find some difficulty in getting any cable office in Japan to accept long C.O.D. messages. Besides, in those days long cables were almost unknown.

So off I went next morning, and in due course got on my transport. There was nearly an end of me at the last moment because when the boat I was in got alongside of the transport somebody called out 'Throw us a rope.' A rope was flung down and it was indicated to me that an active person like myself should have no trouble in swarming up it. I did not like the job. However, I seized the rope and was preparing to put my weight upon it when it came away in my hand and I fell back into the boat. Luckily, there was a bit of a swell at the time and the boat was rising with it when I fell. Otherwise I would have come a very bad cropper. But what are you to think of a man who throws a rope ~~down~~

## A ROYAL COMMISSION

for somebody to climb up and does not make his own end of it fast? After this affair, a proper rope ladder was sent down to me and I went up that easily enough. Then followed my kit, including a shapeless bundle which belonged to my servant. Lastly, my servant himself climbed up. He did not like that rope ladder at all.

For the next ten days or so I was extremely busy. I had to write in the one saloon the ship had, and my work was interrupted from time to time while the table was being laid for meals. I believe that but for those interruptions I would have been writing steadily all the day and half the night. However, the task was finished before the ship arrived at Shanghai, and she did not stay there more than two hours, and I had just time to post my packet to the *Daily Telegraph*. A copy, of course, of what I wrote, I kept for the Indian newspapers. But as we were going straight on to Calcutta it was not necessary to post it.

Now I must relate a strange psychic experience I had on the ship. I call it psychic because I do not know how else to describe it. On two successive nights I lived again two days that had passed, that is to say all the events that had taken place at the battle of Peitsang passed before me so absolutely vividly that I felt that I was really experiencing them again and for the first time. The other event related to

## BACK FROM THE FRONT

the night when the boat I was in had drifted away from the mosquito place and I was left at the mercy of the Chinese crew. I would like you to understand that it is hardly possible to use the word dream in connection with what I felt and saw and thought. The things were really, so it seemed to me, happening again, though while they were happening I was not aware that they had happened before, nor did I know what was going to happen next in a series of events. In both cases, when I woke up I stared about in surprise finding myself in a bunk in a steamer, instead of being, in the one case lying in a field of corn, and in the other in the well of a small boat.

People often speak of 'living again in the past.' Do they mean just the memories of events that they had experienced, memories so vague that they have hardly any connection with one another? That is what I understand the expression to mean. But these two days I have mentioned did not appear in any vague or disconnected manner, nor were the people who appeared shadowy and unreal. In every particular what the brain cells projected were events as they had actually taken place. For days and days afterwards I carried these two dreams about with me just as I would have carried actual events. In fact, I remember them all the more clearly because the dreams were but a repetition of what had actually taken place.

## A ROVING COMMISSION

This part of my story should, in the natural course, end here, but I was always one for pointing morals and laying down the law. This habit has sometimes made me unpopular, because no one likes dictators. But I cannot help myself. And the law I want to lay down is something like this: that no one should allow a great experience to pass without trying to draw some lessons from it. The lesson I was prepared to draw from what I saw of this China war was nothing concerned with my own conduct of affairs, but with the conduct of war. I saw right off that the first thing that people who wish to conduct a war should study is that of transport. They must have means of moving troops and supplies about. Now it happened that the only troops who had any kind of transport worth talking about were the Indian troops. They had mules for their first-line transport and for their second-line transport. Besides these mules, which were attached to each unit, there were whole mule corps with several hundred animals in each, and these carried baggage and supplies. The Indian troops were always being held back because the others were unable to keep up. There was a British regiment with the British troops, but it had no transport at all, as far as I could see. The others seemed to depend on what they could conscript and on boats on the river.

## **BACK FROM THE FRONT**

That was one lesson that I carried away with me. There was one other, which was so novel and strange that when I mentioned it to other people they urged me never to mention such a thing again, particularly to regular officers, because I would be set down as a fool. And yet what I saw was something that was actually accepted as sound tactics in warfare by the American troops. It may be remembered that when describing the march up to Peking I said that at one point during the night I and two other correspondents were stopped by a party of American infantry who said that they had mistaken us for Tartar cavalry. Note the method adopted by these American soldiers. In the British army textbooks of those days there was only one method of meeting cavalry. That was by fixing bayonets and bunching together in groups. These Americans did nothing of the kind. They extended into intervals of three or four paces per man and each man lay down. That is to say, that if it had been necessary every man would have been able to shoot at any cavalry approaching, whereas, by fixing bayonets and grouping together, rifle fire becomes difficult and almost impossible. The great point is to bring enemy horse and man down before they can get at you.

Later on I was to draw other conclusions about war, particularly about the use of the bayonet, but



## **A ROVING COMMISSION**

at that time my thoughts were not clear and I shall not mention here the argument that was slowly shaping itself in my mind.

What happened when I got back again? What did the papers which had employed me say? Well, they printed what I gave them and I had no word from any one of them to say that they were dissatisfied. I can add this, that while people like editors were neither pleased nor displeased, there were others who read what I had written and apparently found it good. They also remembered it against a time when I wanted to go war-corresponding again. And I did draw a moral for myself, but it was not till later that I appreciated it. I will tell it to you here now.

If you are reporting anything for a newspaper and if another man should get ahead of you, do not be dismayed; follow up the story with fuller detail; put everything you have into it and you will find that you are forgiven for allowing yourself to be overtaken.

My next adventure in war was to be even more romantic than this Peking business. It was in a wild and bitter country, full of magic and mystery, and the fighting was to be of an even stranger and wilder character. For it fell to my lot to go with Young-husband to Lhasa. Now read on, please.

## WAR IN TIBET

In the summer of 1903, there were persistent rumours in the bazaars in India that the Government of India intended to invade Tibet and annex it. The Government of India denied all such intentions, but the reports continued persistently. I remember that one day I went into Northern Calcutta to enquire from residents of a small Tibetan colony established there what they knew of such reports. Their answer was rather astonishing, because they said that so far from the Government of India invading and annexing Tibet there was every possibility of the Government of Tibet invading and annexing India. This statement was made to me quite seriously, but my informant added something which made me cogitate. It was to the effect that if Tibet had no such intention as stated, why was the Indian Government making all kinds of defensive preparations in Sikkim. The informant added that there were soldiers at work on roads in Sikkim and he had had a letter from a man in Tibet who said that all the inhabitants of

## **A ROVING COMMISSION**

the province of U had been warned by the authorities in Lhasa to be prepared for war. On this I was able to induce my editor to send me to Sikhim to see for myself whether anything unusual was happening, though I must say that this permission was only obtained after we had had a letter from a planter in Darjeeling to say that something was certainly afoot. So off I went.

When I got to Silliguri I wondered how it could be maintained that nothing was afoot. Huts were being prepared and convoys and provisions were moving up the big Himalayan road. I also heard people talk of a general paying a visit of inspection. Now Silliguri was not a military station of any kind; at that time it was merely the terminus of the broad-gauge railway. What would a general be inspecting there? Tea-gardens?

After some difficulty I managed to hire a pony and rode up the road, and I suppose it was about twelve or thirteen miles up that I met my first party of troops. They were Sikh Pioneers, and they told me that a whole battalion was engaged along some twenty or thirty miles of the road, improving it. I did not think it necessary to get any further information, but I do remember that when I made an enquiry at Fort William I was told very politely that there was no reason why troops whose business was road making should not be kept in training.

## WAR IN TIBET

making roads. As for the General's tour of inspection, what the General had gone to Silliguri for was to take part in a tiger shoot. However, I was satisfied in my mind that something was brewing, and I never ceased from bothering my paper to do its best to allow me to go as a correspondent in the war I knew was pending.

The paper was not very keen about it, but later, when the Government of India could no longer disguise the fact that relations with Tibet were very strained and that an expedition might cross the frontier, I found a powerful supporter in Reuter's very able representative in India. He is now Sir Edward Buck. He arranged that I should go for Reuter, whether my paper, the *Englishman*, permitted it or not. It appears that both he and certain officers in Simla had read those articles about the war in China which I had written and were satisfied that I could be entrusted with the job that was now open to me.

Thus it came about that one morning early in the winter of 1903-4, I found myself in a railway-carriage bound for Silliguri. I had to take a good deal of kit with me because of the cold that I knew we had to face. All this kit was neatly packed, and I had upon each package a label with my name on it, under which I placed the word 'Reuter.' I don't quite know why, but it seemed good to me then.

There was another man in the compartment with me, and he eyed these labels with an interest that seemed unusual.

Some people will never talk to strangers. I always do, because I find that strangers talk to me more readily than other people who have found me out. And so quite soon this stranger and I were talking amicably together. He told me that he was going up to Darjeeling and that his name was Candler. He had travelled very extensively, I found, all over India and the East. Then suddenly he asked me, pointing to the labels on my kit, whether I was going up to the war. I was very pleased to tell him that I was. He questioned me as to what plans I had for getting to the headquarters of the British force which had already established itself in the Chumbi Valley on the further side of the Himalayas. I told him I thought the army would provide transport for my kit, while I hoped to be able to purchase a pony at Silliguri. After that, I said, there was nothing more to be done. I had simply to ride on from post to post till I reached my destination.

Candler was evidently pleased to have all this information as to my intended doings, and I wondered why. It was only later on that I learned that he was going up as correspondent for the *Daily Mail*.

## WAR IN TIBET

Next morning we arrived at Silliguri. Candler had jumped into the tiny train which climbs the hill to Darjeeling, and I got out my kit and went to interview the officer in charge of the camp that had been established by the railway-station. He gave me a shock, for, although he said he was glad to see me, he had no authority to provide me with any transport and could not do so. If I wanted my kit carried up to Chumbi I would have to make my own arrangements. My next step was to find out who the local civil authority was. I found him. He was an Indian. On my asking him whether he could help me in any way to buy animals he replied that he was sorry but he could not. I never thought at the time of showing him the correspondent's pass that I had, but it struck me afterwards that he had been warned months before not to encourage any newspaper men to get information.

Back I went to the railway-station, and there I found one or two people, railway men, who did their best to help me. I was not able to buy any animals, but I got five hefty hillmen who were prepared to carry my baggage to Chumbi. Late in the afternoon a man came along who sold me a stout Bhutia pony, which served me well and gallantly all through the campaign. I had brought with me a Mohammedan body-servant and a man who was to be employed as a kind of orderly. He was an

## PROVING COMMISSION

ex-soldier. Also I found a syce, a Behar man, who was willing to come along.

So there was quite a little troop of us next morning ready to start off on the adventure. I think it was just before we went that a man at the railway-station told me that this Candler, to whom I had been talking, was the *Daily Mail* man. Then the idea took hold of me that I must at all costs get into Chumbi before him. He had gone up to Darjeeling, it is true, but at Darjeeling he would be able to get all the ponies and animals he wanted, whereas I, with my porters marching painfully up the road, would probably be many days behind him in getting to Chumbi. I told my Mohammedan servant that he and the others were to follow as hard as they could, but I would ride on.

This was a pretty mad proposition, for, mind you, the journey in front of us was not a one-day march but involved the crossing of the whole Himalayan chain. On the pony, if I wanted to hurry, I could not carry any bedding and would have to depend on the kindness of the officers at the camps where I stayed for shelter and everything. But I was reckless and did not care, and it struck me that the one thing I had to do was to beat Candler and not allow the *Daily Mail* to get ahead of me in news or anything else.

As I cantered gaily along that morning and

## WAR IN TIBET

breasted the rise at Sivoke I was very happy indeed, feeling that I had come to a decision which would enable me to be the first correspondent into the valley. But I had not reckoned with the fact that if I had a mad idea, Candler was also wild and reckless. I learned later on that he did actually start from Darjeeling on the afternoon of the very day that he had left me. Thinking himself pretty well ahead he did not worry until he got down to the Teesta bridge. There he met some troops and learned from them that he was the first man representing a newspaper to come along. He thereupon hurried on again as fast as he could.

Knowing nothing of Candler's movements, I rode along very steadily, and my pony, as I have said, was a very stout one. In my excitement, I hardly noticed the time or the miles that passed. It was already growing dark when I thought I would do yet another stage of twelve miles to Rungpo, but my horse was now getting tired, and the night had become pitch dark before I had gone more than half way. There was no place to stop at.

These Himalayan roads are not protected in any way, and it was rather alarming riding along the edge of precipices in the dark. But there was nothing for it but to continue. I think it must have been about eleven o'clock when I was aware that we were coming to an encampment of some kind.



There were a few people about still, and a sepoy said that he would show me where the sahibs were. There were two or three officers in the dak bungalow, and luckily for me they were up playing cards or something. They were amazed when they heard that I had come, in one day, all the way from Silliguri, and were still further amazed when I said that I was going on at six next morning. However, they found blankets for me and a bed and food and drink.

Though I expected to be very tired and sore next morning, I was not, and rode on blithely enough, feeling certain now that I had got ahead of Candler. That day I do not think I did more than twelve miles. Something delayed me, I forget now exactly what it was. But on the third day I was received, I think it was at Sindonchin, by an officer who seemed to expect me, for I found that a tent was prepared and a meal ready and all kinds of things. When I enquired why he expected me he said that he had received a message from headquarters at Chumbi to the effect that I was coming up and that I was to be provided with transport if I wanted it. He was astonished to learn that I was several days ahead of my transport. He pointed out that the cold would be much more intense as I got higher and higher and he thought that I should stay at the post till my kit came up. I could not agree to this, but still being certain that I was ahead of Candler I

## WAR IN TIBET

did not push on that day. Instead, I spent it writing out a long message to Reuter and to the Indian papers to which I had been accredited.

Next morning, called to a breakfast before I started off again, my host told me with a smile that it was not necessary for me to continue the race because Candler had passed through that post two nights before. This wonderful man had ridden down from Darjeeling and had followed the road past Rungpo and the other posts I have mentioned, apparently at a great speed in the dark on a special pony he had purchased in Darjeeling. I might add that he slept only a few hours at Sindonchin and had continued next morning and had actually got into Chumbi in two days. It was a remarkable piece of horsemanship and, of course, put my effort quite into the shade.

Being beaten in the race, I thought I need not hurry any more, but still I did about two stages a day, still without any kit. I arrived at Chumbi late one night and was given a tent and some blankets and things by the 8th Gurkhas. Candler, they told me, had been there for four days, and I had to agree with them that as a correspondent he had given me a good beating.

And yet as it turned out Candler got no credit from the *Daily Mail* for his feat. The reason was there was no news at all at Chumbi, or if there was,

we were not allowed to get it. In fact, it was I who got whatever credit attached to newspaper correspondents from Tibet in those early days. To begin with, during the morning of the day on which I left Calcutta, I had written a complete statement of the reasons why it was necessary to send a Mission to Lhasa. Again, at Silliguri I had written another article describing the elaborate transport arrangements that had been made for supplying the troops. I had even done a third article at Sindonchin in which I described the tremendous nature of the scenery on the road. When I reached Chumbi, though there was no news, I was still able to write a column or two enlarging on the formidable nature of the hills and other obstacles that had to be negotiated by troops attempting to enter Tibet. Candler had not written a single article or sent any messages of any kind, and he was put out when, on meeting him, I told him what I had done. He had been rather exulting over me but now he exulted no more.

Since those days Sikkim has been written about a great deal. All the Everest Expeditions have travelled the route by which the Mission went. And yet I feel inclined to point out that quite as extraordinary as the changes in the contours of the hills, and in their geological formations, is the variety of the vegetation. Down below, at the foot of the hills,

the vegetation is tropical. Indeed, the jungle is so thick that people wanting to get through it have literally to hew their way. Higher up, the trees do not grow so thickly, but we have giants. Then there is a belt of dwarf oak and pine which is succeeded by firs. Then suddenly the green stops. There is nothing.

At a place called Gnathong there is a sort of stark volcanic rock, and from there on to the top of the Jelap Pass one passes through scenery which makes one believe that one is no longer on earth but on the moon. Everything is so hard and bare. Then from the top of the pass one looks down upon serried rows of gigantic firs, stretching far away on each side; very gloomy and impressive they look, rank on rank. I remember thinking to myself as I looked on those stiff and lonely giants that there must be some magnificent shooting in this part of the world. Lower down, when we got to Yatung and Chumbi, the scene became quite pleasant again. There were no flowers at that time of the year, but there were many signs of cultivation and of a gentle climate, rather English.

But whenever there is war on there are always some people who will enquire why it is on. In this Tibet business what did we want to fight each other for? Usually, the causes of war are always so remote that I, for one, would like to take them for granted

He

and so sit down to enjoy the fighting without bothering my head about the reasons for it. Still, I suppose I had better answer the questions that are likely to be asked.

The trouble, I think, arose originally over the tea trade in Tibet. The sale of tea in Tibet was a monopoly of one or two powerful priestly families. These people got all their tea from China. They objected strongly to a green tea that was being manufactured in India and was passing into Tibet. In 1889 they attempted to prevent this trade by advancing into Sikkim itself and building a wall across the road on our side of the Jelap Pass. This, of course, was a violation of British territory. A British force was sent up, and the Tibetans were sent flying headlong. They were so surprised that they immediately signed a treaty which permitted the entrance of Indian tea into Tibet. But by 1902, they had forgotten all about what had happened in 1889, or nearly forgotten. They built another wall to stop traffic, but it was on their own side of the country. Anyway, the trade in tea was stopped, in defiance of the treaty they had signed.

Then another cause of quarrel was the activity of a Mongol who called himself Dorjiew, that is to say 'The Thunderbolt.' This man was undoubtedly in the pay of Russia, and he rose very high in the estimate of the Dalai Lama and his Council because

he had the gift of disintegrating himself, that is to say, he could in a moment dissolve himself into nothing and project himself thousands of miles to some place where he appeared in the solid flesh again. He would be talking to the Dalai Lama one day; then, when the Dalai Lama wanted to see him on the next day, he could not be found. On the third day he would appear again and tell the astonished Tibetans that he had been to St. Petersburg in order to interview the Tsar. Whether a man of such ability as the Dalai Lama believed this nonsense or not, this Dorjjeff certainly did what he liked with the Tibetan Government, which passed all kinds of regulations permitting free trade with Russia while severe penalties were imposed on those who purchased British goods.

These proceedings were viewed with great disfavour by Lord Curzon, who sent a letter to the Dalai Lama protesting and adding that the trade agreement must be observed and the wall built at Yatung pulled down. But months passed before any frontier official could be induced to receive any letter from the Government of India to be forwarded to Lhasa. Finally, a letter did reach the Dalai Lama. He returned it with the seal unbroken.

Here then in a few crisp sentences is what was the British case against Tibet. It seems to me to be a fairly good one. We could hardly allow Russia

to establish herself on the eastern glacis of the Himalayas as she had done on the western. If we had taken no steps at all, matters would have gone from bad to worse and the Tibetans would probably have received Russian help in the way of arms and munitions. So Lord Curzon decided to send a Mission to Tibet which was to proceed to Lhasa and settle definitely whether Russian-influenced Tibet could be made to see reason.

When I got to Chumbi the rumours were that the Mission would certainly not be allowed to get to Lhasa without opposition, and so everybody was hoping there would be a tussle or two amongst the high hills. The hills were high enough when it did come to fighting, and the Tibetan soldiery, with their prong-guns, leather cannon, bows and arrows, slings, and really formidable rock-traps, were disconcerting enough.

I spent two or three peaceful months in the Chumbi Valley. As I have said before, there was nothing doing in the way of news or news-writing when Candler and I arrived in the valley. Later on another correspondent arrived in the person of Perceval Landon of *The Times*, a most remarkable and gifted person. We were not allowed, at first, to travel beyond the Chumbi Valley. Later on, permission was given us to go to Fort Phari, which I, at any rate, then thought was the extreme point at

which our troops had established themselves. As a matter of fact, when I made use of the permission to go to Phari I found that the Mission and some of its escort had established themselves at Tuna, fifteen miles farther on. But we were not allowed to go to Tuna till that final moment when it was decided to push on to Lhasa.

So I spent my days scribbling a little, and for the rest observing the fauna and flora of the country. Also I found the inhabitants of the Chumbi Valley and their customs and habits very interesting. I had a rifle and a shotgun with me and would have dearly loved to break away for a few days into the hills on either side of the valley, but such excursions were forbidden. On the one side were the wild marches of Bhutan; the attitude of the people of Bhutan was, at that time, uncertain; on the other side were Tibetans, who, though to all appearances very friendly, would naturally resent our presence. So my excursions were restricted. Still, in one way or another, I learned a good deal. I suppose I could write a book now about the Chumbi Valley.

I messed, for the most part, with the 8th Gurkhas, and I look back on the days I spent at Chumbi with this fine regiment with great pleasure. I learned much about Gurkhas then. They are people everybody admires, but I did not know until I got to Chumbi how magnificent are their characteristics.



Their loyalty to their officers is a most amazing thing; as to their courage, the whole world has learned to admire it. But what I like most about them is their cheerfulness, even at times of acute discomfort. The Gurkha is always smiling. In spite of their small stature they have the courage of vikings. An American has summed them up very well in a phrase that is now familiar in another sense in dubbing them 'pocket battleships.'

The other troops comprising the escort at that time consisted of two regiments of Sikh Pioneers, the 23rd and the 32nd. The rank and file of these regiments consisted of a special caste of Sikhs called Mazbis, who were enlisted because they were very good with spade and pickaxe and shovel. They were certainly a hardy lot. There is nothing troops hate so much as fatigues; they do not want to make roads, and a spade is abhorrent to them, but these Mazbis went at it hard all day, and mind you, they were fighting men too. Their hard labour with digging and picking implements was not allowed to interfere with their training as soldiers. Once when looking back over some files of a newspaper I found a letter to the editor from an officer who was in Abyssinia at the time of our Abyssinian war, and he had noticed there the valuable nature of the work done by the Indian pioneer regiments with the troops. He added that, in his opinion, all troops

should be trained as pioneers. That letter did not fall on fertile soil, and to-day I think I am right in saying there are no pioneer battalions at all in the British or Indian armies. Which is a pity.

I wish I had seen more of these pioneers in the Chumbi Valley. Later, of course, when the fighting began there was not much time to make the acquaintance of anybody. The memories of spring in the Chumbi Valley are very pleasant. There were English flowers everywhere. I remember particularly masses of wild roses and how the Tibetans devoured the blossoms and the fruit also. I remarked about this to a medical officer, who stared at me in surprise. He said: 'Don't you know that roses belong to the same family as apples and plums? Why shouldn't the blossom and the fruit be eaten, and the leaves too?' To this I had nothing to say: I was too cowed by superior knowledge even to raise a sceptical eyebrow.

One day, determined to send the readers of the newspapers which were employing me something to show that I was still alive, I wrote a somewhat romantic and fanciful account of the adventures of a handful of Frenchmen who had worked their way from Chandernagore through Northern Bengal into Sikkim and thence up to Phari. These were the people, I said, who built Fort Phari. This fort is not so very Eastern or Mongolian in appearance. If you

put it down anywhere in Europe people would say it was built in the Middle Ages, or perhaps a bit earlier, during the Crusades. This story I presented to the Press censor, who was a political officer, not a soldier. He wouldn't have it at all. I said that the thing was obviously an effort of the imagination, and putting it in the papers could not possibly have any effect upon the purpose of the Mission. But it was no good, and so the article was lost to posterity. Much of my other writings were cut about, too, though they had nothing to do with the troops or any fighting that was pending. A war correspondent has his private troubles as well as the big ones he is supposed to record.

Candler, I think, had a good time. He was very popular with everybody and travelled up and down the line making friends everywhere. Landon was busy with a big book he contemplated. Then, one day an officer on the staff of General Macdonald told me: 'We are off in a few days, but be silent about it. If a single word comes out you will not be allowed any transport, nor will any other correspondent.' So I kept quiet. The very next day the president of the Gurkha mess told me and one or two others, who had been living with the Gurkhas, that he was afraid the time had come when we would have to make our own arrangements about messing, because we would be off shortly and transport

would be severely cut down. But not a word was to be said. On the third day a transport officer told me that I was to have two mules all to myself on Monday morning, but if I breathed a word about it I would get no mules at all. And so it went on. Everybody was sworn to secrecy, and everybody did his best to make the matter public. Of course, the night before we marched there was no use in pretending that one did not know.

I gave my house away to a veterinary officer. A house in Tibet. For not only did I have a house, but I had built it myself and I named it 'The Emerald Bower.' A servant belonging to the political officer said to me one day that it was quite possible to get Tibetans up from the nearest village to build me a stone hut. They would do it very cheaply. There would be trouble about a roof, but they would bring down some fir branches from the hills and lay them across, and put some mud on them. This man even brought me a contractor who said he would build me a hut for the modest sum of ten rupees. And the thing was done to the astonishment of everybody. Why other officers never thought of having huts built for themselves, I don't know. But let it pass. We are moving on now.

The first day we marched to a place called Gautsa, a narrow place in the middle of a valley. The wood-line ended here. The second day we went to Dauta,

the place where the frozen waterfall is. Yes, there is a waterfall there which remains frozen all through the year. Dauta is one of the coldest places on earth. The troops in their tents spent a very miserable night there, and everyone was glad to get out. The next day we reached Fort Phari. All this country was not new to me because I had moved up and down freely before, but I must tell you about Fort Phari. Though Dauta may be a cold place, Phari is notorious as being the most miserable place on the face of the earth.

The fort is located in the middle of a large plain ten or twelve miles across, and this plain is continually swept by high winds, blowing down from that tremendous mountain Chomolhari. This wind is so bitter that nothing grows on the plain. There is a saying amongst the Tibetans, 'When rice grows at Fort Phari.' One of our political officers took up some paddy and tried to grow it at Phari under some careful supervision, but nothing came of it as far as I know.

A strange thing happened at Fort Phari. When our troops first occupied it it was not known whether the Tibetans would resist or not, and the troops advanced across the plain in very open order. A Gurkha thought he saw an enemy and put up his rifle and pressed the trigger. No report followed. This fact was shouted down the line and other

Gurkhas raised their rifles. The same thing: the cartridges would not go off.

There is, of course, much belief all over the Himalayas in the power of Tibetan magicians, and here seemed proof of that power. Luckily, before any kind of a panic spread, an officer, who was coming up behind with a shotgun, thought he would have a shot at some pigeons. His gun was a hammer gun and when he pulled the trigger he found the hammer descending very, very slowly on the nipple of the gun. He soon realised that this was due to the fact that the oil in the gun had frozen hard. Then, when he was told that the rifles of the men in front would not go off, he was able to ride up fast himself and offer an explanation. Luckily, the Tibetans in Phari did not attempt to resist the troops, and that very afternoon the order was given that the rifles were to be carefully cleaned, all oil wiped off them, and on no account must oil be used again.

But though Phari itself is desolate and windswept, that great mountain of Chomolhari is the most fascinating object, calling upon everyone to explore it. Many European travellers since those days have been round the base of the mountain and several have ascended part of it. One has even got to the top. They say that on the farther side there is a series of lovely lakes, which seem to descend in

succession right down to Bhutan. But there was not time then for exploration.

The force marched on to Tuna, over still comparatively level country. Tuna is a little village at the head of the pass of that name, and here we found the headquarters of the Mission and a small escort. Tuna is as miserable a place as Phari. It was colder than ever, and the wind moaned incessantly. The Pass is located at the highest point of the road over the Himalayas, marking the watershed of that range of mountains. It was known that the Tibetans had established themselves a few miles on the other side of the pass at a spot called Guru.

We spent a few days at Tuna, and I remember going out one day with the General and his staff to have a look at the Tibetan position. There was a spot from which one could plainly see the Tibetan tents. The General had a big telescope on a stand and he and the staff had a thorough inspection. Then began a staff talk. I was listening to this rather eagerly, but presently the General saw me and I heard him say to a staff officer, 'Tell Newman to withdraw out of earshot.' After that I always kept clear of the General and his staff, never knowing when I might not be told to withdraw.

There was a delay of a few days at Tuna. Messages were being exchanged between the Tibetans and ourselves. Their purport was always the same.

We said, 'We have orders to go on to Lhasa and there negotiate a treaty with the Dalai Lama. We pray you withdraw from the road and let us pass. We have no desire to shed any blood. Indeed we have the strictest orders not to do so. But we have also orders to go to Lhasa and those orders we intend to obey.'

The Tibetans always replied in the same way: 'Strangely enough we have strict orders not to shed blood. We are Buddhists and the shedding of blood is abhorrent unto us. But we also have orders not to let you pass and those orders we intend to obey.'

Obviously this kind of interchange could not go on for ever, and after a week or ten days of it a message was sent to the Tibetans saying that the troops were advancing the next morning and please to clear out of the way. To this the answer was: 'We have your message and we must ask you again not to advance.'

Next morning the troops advanced. There had been slight snow the night before, but the morning was what the Tibetans call 'golden.' There was a clear, bright sun and no wind at all. Everybody marched proudly and full of elation, hoping that there would be a good fight. But I do not suppose any of us had any conception of the terrible tragedy that was to take place in a few hours.



## MAGIC VERSUS MACHINE GUN

The Tibetan camp came into view soon after we had topped the pass. The mounted infantry, scouting ahead, said they had found some Tibetan horsemen who had retired before them, and added that there seemed to be a great deal of activity in the Tibetan camp. And very soon afterwards we saw that there were Tibetans all up along the side of the hill above the road. They were in what looked like extended order, and presently the whisper ran all down our line, 'They are going to fight.' As we approached closer the intention to fight seemed to become more evident, for the Tibetans were now seen to be lined up the slope to our left, and there was a big mass of them effectually blocking the road. But there was no one on the plain below. It was absolutely deserted.

There was riding by my side at the time an officer who was probably the greatest authority on Tibet in India. He told me that the spot where the Tibetans had taken up their position was known to all Tibetan magicians. Close under the road which

wound along the hillside issued a hot spring from which a rivulet meandered across the plain to our right. Colonel Waddell told me that the Tibetans believed that no enemy could cross that stream and that they had put a charm on the stream in addition. Anybody who tried to cross it would simply disappear. That was why, he added, they had made no attempt to defend it.

We must have been about six or eight hundred yards from the position when it was decided to send Gurkhas up the hill to our left and the Sikhs down into the plain to prevent ourselves from being out-flanked in any way. Just as the advance was about to begin again it was noticed that a small cavalcade was coming out of the Tibetan lines. It consisted of a portly personage, over whose head an umbrella was carried, and ten or twelve others, all in silken garments, looking very important. The group rode up and saluted the General and Younghusband, and a carpet or rug was produced upon which the Depon, the Tibetan general, seated himself. I think a camp-stool was found for Younghusband; anyway a sort of circle was soon formed. I was able to get well in front and so was Candler. Captain O'Connor, who knew the Tibetan frontier very well and was secretary to the Mission, acted as interpreter between Younghusband and the Depon.

I was able to hear every word that passed, and the words were very similar to the messages which I have already written about. Younghusband implored the Depon to remove his troops from the road. The Depon asked us to go back. Younghusband then said angrily that, although his instructions were to avoid bloodshed, bloodshed could not be avoided if the Tibetan troops did not move out of the way. The Depon repeated that he was the last man to wish to shed blood, but blood would certainly be shed if we attempted to advance beyond the hot spring. I saw Younghusband move his hand, a gesture implying 'so be it.' The Depon and his officers got up, mounted their ponies and galloped back to their soldiers.

Now, all this time, though we were ready for – indeed, looking forward to – a battle, I do not think anybody really thought that there would be one. The Tibetans, of course, outnumbered us greatly, but they were not well armed, whereas we had our magazine rifles, guns and modern equipment. Presently the order was given to the Gurkhas and others to advance. The advance was a trifle slow because the Gurkhas up the hill had difficult ground to cover. As far as I can remember the members of the Mission and the General and his staff rode in the centre of the line without any troops in front of them; that was another proof of the fact that

nobody really believed that there would be any battle. And after riding a short way we came up to the Tibetans who were blocking the way. They had built a low wall behind which they stood. On our left the Gurkhas had reached the Tibetans who were holding the slope. On our right there were Sikhs who had nobody in front of them, but when the rest of the line halted, they halted also. What was to happen next?

Some kind of an order was sent up the hill to the Gurkhas and they began to shout at the Tibetans in front of them and make threatening gestures, ordering them to get out of the way. The Tibetans yielded to this kind of pressure, but they did not retire so much as come on a parallel course down the hill and join the main body blocking the road.

So then here we were: the Gurkhas on the left and the Sikhs on the right, both groups extended but with nobody in front of them. In front of us, that is to say, the General and the Mission and, I think, about a company of Sikhs, was the Tibetan army, crowded together into what might be called a wide space on the road. It is impossible to estimate how many Tibetans there were; there might have been three thousand or seven thousand. I suppose we numbered about eleven hundred. At first, the Tibetans did not show any actual hostility.

Though we were facing each other almost breast to breast, they were looking at us almost as one might look at animals in a cage. For these were really wild men who had probably not seen foreigners of any kind before. The Indian troops would be as strange to them as the Europeans were. On our part, we examined the Tibetans just as curiously, and I remember that Waddell actually stretched out and took from a Tibetan soldier some sort of a rifle that he carried. The man surrendered it quite willingly, because he realised that Waddell only wanted to examine it.

The first sign of violence I noticed was when some Tibetan soldiers up on the slope would not follow their companions in coming down the hill. I saw a Gurkha officer pick up a stone and hurl it at them. They came down then, but sullenly. Then I saw a Sikh orderly put out his hand and push back a man who was holding a pony, the very pony that the Depon had ridden out upon to meet us. This Tibetan had pushed himself and his pony forward into a break in the Tibetan walls. The Depon was standing close by when this incident took place, and he was carrying in his hand a Winchester rifle. When the man holding the horse was pushed back, the rifle the Depon was holding went off. The shot wounded the Sikh in the jaw.

Now I do not know whether the shot went off by

accident or whether it was a signal, but immediately it did go off the mass of Tibetans in front of us surged forward. Luckily they were on the other side of the wall, or we should all have been swamped immediately. As it was, only a few Tibetans got through before our troops opened fire. The people standing in front of the break in the wall were the General himself, Major Dunlop of the Sikhs, and Candler, and of the Tibetans who first came through the break in the wall all were swordsmen. Candler, I think, was the foremost man. He was attacked by a swordsman who nearly severed his left hand at the wrist, and when Candler, who was unarmed, put up the other hand to shield his head, that was severely cut also. Dunlop was the next man attacked and he got a severe sword-cut. The General would have fallen next but for the fact that his orderly thrust into his hand a shotgun which the General fired from the hip. That killed the leading Tibetan and I think wounded others. A Sikh soldier was the next man to fall. But by that time both the Gurkhas on the left and the Sikhs on the right had realised what had happened and were firing into the mass of Tibetans. The Sikhs lying on the right went forward a little so that they could fire into the flank of the Tibetans.

Before this fire began to be effective some of us in the centre had thought it expedient to retire a bit.

## **A ROVING COMMISSION**

I know that in the morning before we started either Younghusband or some other member of the Mission had said that all civilians who were going forward with the troops were to leave their revolvers with their baggage. We were not to show any arms at all because it was thought that there would not be any fighting; and in any case members of a Mission, which purported to be a mission of peace, should not be possessed of arms. \* So I for one went back behind the soldiers and I suppose the other unarmed people did the same. If we had not we would have probably been shot by our own people. The firing must have continued for four or five minutes and then we saw the Tibetan troops streaming along the road out of Guru. These men had suffered dreadful losses in those few minutes, for when the firing was at its height there was nearly three-quarters of a ring of troops round them, and the fire was of that rapid kind which you can get from magazine rifles.

When the Tibetans began to break we saw a strange sight. Poor Candler, lying on the ground with these terrible wounds, later on described that sight as having impressed him more than anything else he had ever seen. The Tibetans who were moving away were not running; they were walking, with long strides and bent heads. The Gurkhas up the slope had, up to that moment, not fired very

---

## MAGIC VERSUS MACHINE GUN

much but they now began a rapid fire into the retreating Tibetans. The machine gun also came up and opened fire. I realised later that the Tibetans were not running because in the first place they were hampered by their long cloaks and in the second because at that tremendous height it is not possible to run more than thirty or forty yards and not be completely exhausted.

In later days this battle, if it could correctly be so called, when our losses were so few and that of the enemy so many, was cited as an affair of which the British should be thoroughly ashamed. But if I have described correctly what I saw, I think most people would be of the opinion that the thing could not be helped. Certainly if the troops had not opened fire when that rush of swordsmen started there would have been a massacre of the members of the unarmed Mission. It might be said that the firing should have been stopped when the Tibetans began to retire, but again you must understand that the affair was one only of a few minutes. As soon as the General realised that the Tibetans had no more fight left in them he did order a cease fire. But being a soldier he also ordered a pursuit.

The troops formed up again as quickly as possible and moved up the road behind the Tibetans. I did not hear any firing during this pursuit, which went on as far as a village seven or ten miles beyond Guru.



I suppose we reached this spot an hour or two before midday. Then it struck me that an account of this battle must be sent home at once; so back I rode.

Following me all this time was a Gurkha servant who had joined me at Chumbi. This man actually ran behind me to keep up when I pushed forward. I had to ride through the battlefield of Guru. I never thought of counting the dead who had fallen under the merciless fire of the magazine rifle. There were a good many wounded still about and one or two men who were hobbling round. I took no notice of them and they took no notice of me. Riding through that part of the road where the mass of Tibetans had collected I found a man leading a pony and he was stooping over the Tibetan dead and turning the bodies over. Whether he was a servant looking for a master he had lost, or merely some ruffian looting the dead, I do not know. When he saw me he was obviously alarmed and it occurred to me that I might take his pony and mount my servant upon it. So I rode up to him and presented my pipe at him. Mistaking it for a pistol, he surrendered the pony and I put my servant upon it.

At this time there was no sign of any of our men, but a little further on I found a mass of transport formed into a square, and the officer in command

told me that he had had orders to stay there, and he had stayed. He had not the remotest idea whether he had to go on or not, and he said he wished he had thought of seizing a pony or two because he had seen several men bound on the same kind of mission as the man from whom I had taken the pony.

Anyway, I left the officer and his transport and I rode on hard to Tuna. A cup of tea was forthcoming from somewhere, and then I sat down to write my story. I wrote hard and furiously, and the account was done in an hour or so, a good long story. A telegraph office had been established at Tuna, and all I had to do was to get the message censored and sent off. At that time the censorship was in the hands of the Mission and not of the military. Luckily I found Younghusband himself in his tent, and I handed him the message. 'What,' he said, 'have you done it already? I am just about to start writing the official despatch.' Of course I had returned to Tuna two or three hours before Younghusband had started back. Anyway, he then did a very noble thing, he said: 'You will get ahead of the official wire, but there is no reason why you shouldn't get the credit.' And he passed the message.

Now it happened that the telegraphists were as keen as anybody else on the news. They wanted to

## APPROVING COMMISSION

know what had happened. They received the message eagerly, and a signaller said that the line had been specially kept clear to allow news to get through quickly and mine was the first news that had come. With the hastily written sheets in his hand he said: 'This will be in London quicker than you imagine.' And so it happened. The newsboys in the Strand were bellowing through the fog with news of 'horrible slaughter' long before Whitehall had heard of it. A question was asked in Parliament, and I daresay some questions were asked in offices in Whitehall. In fact, officialdom, both in London and in India, was so annoyed at newspapers getting hold of a story like that first that orders were given that no correspondents' messages were to be sent away until two hours after the official report had gone. Enterprise brings its own reward.

After the message had gone I was overcome by sleep and went straight into bed. It was quite dark when I was wakened again by the noise made by the troops returning. It seemed to me that both Sikhs and Gurkhas talked all through that night. I have mentioned before how, after the excitement of a battle, sleep often overcomes troops. In this case, however, the troops had to follow in pursuit at once after the battle. I suppose the reaction had passed by the time the troops returned to camp. They must have been terribly tired, because I

imagine that they had covered about twenty-five miles that day, and twenty-five miles in those high altitudes is very good marching. But, whether tired or not, the troops talked all night. Sometimes their voices rose so high that I wondered whether they were not on the point of coming to blows.

Next morning, to my surprise, I found furious arguments developing among the officers and among the members of the Mission. Disputes arose as to the exact sequence of the events which had taken place the day before and even about their nature. For instance, there were some who denied that the Tibetans had built a wall of any kind. But I distinctly remember that wall. It extended across the road and for some way up the hill. As I have explained before it did not descend into the plain. Some of the Gurkhas got over the wall when they drove the Tibetans from the slope. Those on the farthest flank had no wall to climb. The Sikhs on the right, who had at first aligned themselves with the rest of the troops, finding nothing in front of them, pushed forward, thus forming the semi-circle I have mentioned. Both Sikhs and Gurkhas were accordingly able, when the firing began, to fire straight into the masses of Tibetans, without having any obstacle in their way. I remember also arguing that if there had been no wall at all the whole body of Tibetans would have fallen upon the Mission as

## A ROVING COMMISSION

soon as the surge forward began, but as it was, only a few men got through the way that had been left open.

The disputes which were taking place in the camp at Tuna were, later on, I was told, revived in military circles all over the world. All the despatches and letters that were sent to England about this affair agreed that it was without parallel in the history of warfare, and naturally students of warfare examined the story and pulled it to pieces in order to make it fall in with theories of their own. What they did not explain was how so many Tibetans had been killed with such a slight loss on our part. I think what I have written explained how it happened. Mind you, the bulk of the Tibetans did not have modern weapons. The Tibetan arm at that time was undoubtedly the sword. A few men had spears, and those who had muskets and firearms of any kind were, I suppose, too flustered to use them. Anyway, the affair shows how useless are the weapons of Nineveh and Babylon against modern arms.

At this point I might digress a little to say something which will further annoy the advocates of the *arme blanche*. At a later stage of this campaign an opportunity occurred for the Gurkhas to charge into a body of Tibetans who had been trapped in a courtyard. These too had no firearms. But they were shouting and brandishing their swords and

## MAGIC VERSUS MACHINE GUN

were full of fight. The officer who was with the Gurkhas suggested to his subahdar that the men should go in with their kukris, the famous Gurkha dagger, or short sword, whichever you may like to call it. The subahdar said that it would be far easier to shoot at the Tibetans than to fight them hand to hand. He added, too, that Gurkhas cut up their food with their kukris and would not care to use them on human beings. The British officer, who told me this story himself, was extremely surprised at this answer, and he said to the subahdar; 'Why, if you do not consider the kukri a weapon of war, did you, when the regiment left Shillong, draw your kukris and kiss the blade.'

'I don't know why we did that,' said the Gurkha. 'Only you had taught us to do it. There is no such custom in Nepal as that of kissing the kukri.'

The officer then realised that it was the Scottish habit of kissing the dirk which had been introduced into the Gurkha battalions. The stolid Gurkhas did not understand the custom, but they did what they were told.

Another story of a similar kind and in connection with another Gurkha regiment. During the campaign in Mesopotamia a Gurkha brigadier, just before an assault was due, asked the colonel of a Gurkha regiment whether his men would not prefer to leave their rifles behind and go over the top with

## **A ROVING COMMISSION**

their kukris only. The colonel said that he would enquire, and his enquiry elicited the fact that not a single Gurkha wanted to leave his rifle behind him and trust only to the kukri.

These two stories will shock large numbers of people who have been brought up in the Gurkha tradition. But I am out to say what I think, and in any case it is just as well that the truth should be known. Indeed, because someone is now preparing to contradict and defy me, let me add that only quite recently a very famous Gurkha regiment decided to abandon the kukri as a weapon. This battalion no longer carries kukris either in peace or in war, and that is the best proof I can produce of the fact that the kukri is an obsolete weapon. But there, I must not go on and on about a subject that can only interest professional soldiers. Back to Tuna.

I do not remember for how long we were there, but it must have been for at least two weeks, pending instructions from the Government of India and from the Home Government about what to do next. It was impossible to get into touch with the Tibetan authorities, and finally instructions reached the Mission that it was to proceed to Lhasa. Also it was stated in the House of Commons that the British Government 'was now at war with Tibet.' That being the case the conduct of affairs passed from the hands of Younghusband into the hands of General

## AGIC VERSUS MACHINE GUN

Macdonald, who was hitherto only the officer in command of the escort. He was now an officer conducting a campaign.

So the march started which we expected was to continue day after day till we reached Lhasa. No one believed that the Tibetans had any fight left in them. In fact, it was thought that the flower of the Tibetan army had been destroyed at Guru and that there was nobody left to fight. As it turned out we were mistaken. Perhaps the flower of the army had been destroyed, but still the Tibetans had large reserves of man-power, and these were being gathered together unknown to us. It is true that there were some Tibetans who told us not to be too sure that there would be no more fighting. The day after the affair at Guru we sent out carts and brought in a number of wounded who were still lying on the road. Later on other wounded came in, one or two on the backs of their wives, who had heard that we were treating the wounded. All these people were very grateful, but I rather think that they at first thought that we were only saving them to kill them. They warned us then that more armies were being prepared against us, and later on, when there might have been a catastrophe, similar wounded to those we had treated at Tuna warned us again.

The march on to Gyantse was dull. The country



was not quite a plain, but we did pass two or three large lakes and there was one little skirmish. I did not see much of it. I only heard of it, but this was the occasion on which the Tibetans used leather guns. We had no casualties, and the Tibetans, I think, only wanted to make a show. There was no fight left in that lot. The reason why I did not see the fighting was because it took place at a spot which had the name of Red Idol Gorge. This was such a fascinating spot that I lagged behind to admire it. The gorge has its name from a rough figure carved out from a great rock at the further end. It was painted a brilliant red and had a lour-ing, threatening look. I believe that the Tibetans had painted it afresh in the hope of giving us a good fright.

Then one day, turning a corner, for we had now passed into very rough country, there was Gyantse in front of us. It lay in a plain which had a certain amount of vegetation and crops and several groves of trees. The fort itself was perched on a rock. I remember when I caught sight of it that the General and his staff were examining the rock through that famous telescope which the General had an orderly to carry with him wherever he went. With the naked eye I could distinguish a sort of fissure in the rock. There were three or four walls at regular intervals down the face of the rock.

## **MAGIC VERSUS MACHINE GUN**

When I came up the General was saying, 'I think if we have to take that fort the fissure marks the way up.' As he said that, he could not have known that we should indeed have to take that fort, nor that the fissure would be the scene of a remarkable feat of gallantry for which a Victoria Cross would be presented.

## BITTER FIGHTING AT GYANTSE

No opposition was offered to us as we marched down into the Gyantse plain. We passed a few farms on the way which were deserted, and the force finally encamped at a spot some eight hundred yards from the fort. This spot was surrounded with trees, and a pleasant little river ran past it. Next day a few Tibetans ventured near the camp, and in the course of a few days we noted that the town of Gyantse was filling up with what seemed to be its usual population. There were no signs of hostility. The fort seemed to be empty, but the General did not quite like the idea of camping so close to what might be turned into a dominating position, so he decided to dismantle the fort as far as possible; that is to say, some of the walls round it were destroyed. Certainly, when the Pioneers had finished their work you could hardly speak of a fort at the top of the rock. They dismantled the buildings thoroughly.

No arms of any kind were found in the fort, or stores, or provisions. In one room there was a great collection of bronze and brass figures. These

were divided amongst the officers, and I got one or two bronzes myself. There was a row about this distribution afterwards, and some people called it scandalous looting. But the figures could hardly be termed art treasures. They were of the kind that you can purchase in Nepalese bazaars; really there was nothing to make a great cry about. I know that the troops only laughed when they were told that there was a great outcry going on at home about their looting habits. I might say at once that there was a certain amount of looting at Gyantse after the fighting, of which I am about to speak, had started. But there was never, at any time, that kind of scandalous looting which marked the campaign in China. But whatever looting there was, I think the Tibetan campaign was the last occasion on which troops were permitted to loot – at least British troops. Think of the opportunities offered during the Great War by places like Basra and Bagdad for looting, but there was no pillaging when they were occupied.

To return to Gyantse. The inhabitants were, at first, as I have said, respectful, then they became friendly. As far as I could gather, the Mission was not in the first days able to get into touch with the Lhasa authorities at all, but it decided to halt at Gyantse for a short while in the hope of doing so. Finally, it must have been after three or four weeks,

Lhasa did reply to the messages we were sending. The reply was to this effect: 'Go back. Such an intrusion was never heard of, that people should come uninvited into Tibet and demand to interview the Dalai Lama. If you go back we may listen to what you have to say, but while you stay on Tibetan soil we cannot negotiate with you.' Other messages took the same tone.

Of course, we were all delighted to hear of these messages, for we wanted to get to Lhasa, and if the Tibetans caved in and made a treaty there would be no hope of getting to that romantic city. During the delay at Gyantse careful investigations were made about transport and supplies, and it was clear that, if the force was to go to Lhasa, stores would have to be collected, in much larger quantities than first estimated, at railhead and Chumbi. In order to throw less strain on the transport the General decided to return to Chumbi with his staff and also to reduce the number of troops at Gyantse. I was asked whether I would go back to Chumbi or stay at Gyantse. Of course I elected to stay and so did Perceval Landon, that gifted *Times* correspondent whom I have already mentioned.

Both of us were glad we stayed, because exciting events which we would have missed otherwise were about to take place. Also I was able, during the days of peace, to satisfy my curiosity more and more

about Tibetans and their manners and customs. I was in the town, which lies at the base of that big rock, every day. No Tibetan suggested I was an intruder when I wandered into courtyards or even into private houses. They were all friendly. Sometimes an interpreter from the Mission accompanied me. I could write a book about what I learned in Gyantse, but let us get on to the fighting.

One day when I was in the town I saw looking out of an upper window a face I did not like at all: a very malevolent face. Later on I saw two or three other faces I did not like, all in upper windows, and it occurred to me that people from outside were coming into Gyantse and were very hostile to us. That same night information reached Colonel Brander, of the 32nd Pioneers, that large forces of Tibetans were assembling at the Karo-la and were building a wall across the valley: the pass is about twenty-five miles from Gyantse. Colonel Brander was one of those soldiers who believed in striking at once. Without hesitation and without asking for orders, Brander immediately organised a column which was to attack and drive away the Tibetans at the pass. The column consisted of about two companies of Pioneers and two of Gurkhas, with as little transport as possible. Only first-line ammunition was carried. And so off we went.

We found that wall soon enough. It stretched

across a valley which narrowed down to about four hundred yards. On each side the hills were very steep. The Pioneers were sent to make a direct attack on the wall. They extended very nicely and went straight up to it, though it was very evident from the glimpses one caught of the activity behind the wall that it was strongly held. The leading party of Pioneers was suddenly greeted with a tremendous volley which killed an officer and stopped the advance. Brander then retired the attacking party to a spot under cover, while he sent Gurkhas up on the left and Pioneers up on the right to outflank the wall. This operation took a long time because the climb was tedious and very often after going a certain way the troops had to return to try another route. It was while waiting for the flanking operations to be completed that Colonel Brander received a message that well might have turned a less resolute man pale.

The message, which was brought by a frantic servant of the Mission on a pony which he had galloped all the way, was to the effect that the night after we had started to turn the Tibetan army out of the pass the post at Gyantse had been attacked by a very large number of Tibetans who had nearly forced their way into the camp. They had been driven off but had not dispersed. They had occupied the deserted fort and were now busy building it

up again. I think there was only a company of Gurkhas left behind to hold the post and its reserve stores and ammunition. If disaster was to be avoided it was obvious that we must all hurry back. Indeed we must hurry for our own sakes, because if the ammunition in the camp fell into Tibetan hands we would be done, for, as I have said, we had no reserve ammunition. But was it possible to break off the battle at this stage? Immediately we began to retire the Tibetans behind the wall would be upon us, and, hampered with our mules and baggage, we might be cut off and perish even before we got to Gyantse.

Brander, as I have said, was a man of courage and resource. He showed no signs of perturbation. He made up his mind at once that it would be madness to break off the battle. We must win it. The only order he gave after receiving the message from Gyantse was that we were to be as sparing of ammunition as possible. Of course, the bulk of us did not know that a message of any kind had reached Brander, and we took the order merely as a precautionary one.

After we had been waiting for some time for affairs to develop, I and a few others, who had been lying on some rising ground looking at the wall, saw Tibetans beginning to climb over it towards us. Naturally, I thought that this meant a wild rush at



us. I remember feeling very pleased indeed that on this occasion I was armed. I had a Winchester with me, and one of the ideas in my mind was that, whatever orders might be issued, I, for my own part, would not begin to fire till the enemy had reached within a certain distance, about one hundred and fifty yards away. But there was no charge. Only a dozen men or so clambered over the wall; they were after the rifles of the Pioneers who had been killed when our attack was made. These Tibetans were fired upon by Sikhs who were in advance of the main body, and they soon returned hastily to the shelter of the wall.

How long a time passed before anything else happened I cannot say. At one time, looking up on the left, I saw that some Gurkhas seemed to be retiring, but I realised very quickly afterwards that they were only again seeking a new way to outflank the Tibetans. These latter had a couple of defence works, consisting of semi-circular walls or sangars, high up the hill. The men holding them were, I was told afterward, well armed. But they were outflanked in due course, and when they discovered this they made haste to get away. The Gurkhas and Pioneers, after turning the sangars, found to their joy and surprise that they could look down on the Tibetan camp below. It was full of men, the majority of whom were crouched behind the wall

waiting for an attack. Of course, the Sikhs and Gurkhas opened fire at once. I suppose in some ways they were reminded of what had happened at Guru, only of course, the range was far greater. The Tibetans fled at once.

We, in the valley below, were not immediately aware of the flight, but as soon as the fact became known Brander ordered everybody to go forward. There was a general rush for the wall. There was no opposition; everybody had run away. The Tibetans, of course, had not lost as many men as they did at Guru, but their losses were severe enough, I think, to give them a good fright. It is probable that those who fought us at the pass never fought us again.

When the news of this victory reached our transport and servants, who had naturally been halted at our over-night camp before we started to open the battle, many followers came up to see what had happened and possibly to pick up any loot. Amongst them was my Gurkha servant, but he had an excuse. He brought my pony along with him, for which I was very grateful, for I was rather tired that day. He then clambered over the wall to look at the Tibetan camp, which was, of course, in a state of great confusion and disorder. Many of the tents were half pulled down, and a great deal of heavy clothing and other articles lay scattered about.

I saw my servant poking about inside a tent from which he suddenly emerged with a heavy scarlet gown in his arms. This garment must have certainly belonged to a very high Tibetan official. He threw it over the back of my pony and I possessed it all through the campaign, to the dissatisfaction of numbers of people who would have liked to possess it themselves. But this cloak or gown was so heavy that I could not walk about in it. Obviously it was only meant for use at night, and that was the use to which I put it.

Then back to our camp of the night before. Still that resolute man Brander did not let the troops know anything of the message he had received. The only orders he had given were to the effect that there was to be a very early start next morning to return to Gyantse. There was to be no pursuit of the enemy. We all believed this was because we had neither the transport nor the supplies to continue the forward march.

On the first day of this return march I remember I rode with the advance guard of Gurkhas. It was not till then, I think, that I realised what a difficult business scouting can be, particularly when, owing to the high and precipitous nature of the country, it is impracticable to send out flanking parties. Such parties even under ordinary conditions would have found it almost impossible to keep pace with the

rest of the troops. I imagine that Major Row, the officer with whom I was riding, knew exactly what had happened at Gyantse, and he also knew, what I did not, that there was a possibility of the Tibetans who had attacked the Mission coming out to fight us on our return journey. It was the obvious thing to do as a matter of fact; so now I understand why even I was asked to keep my young eyes on the hills, and to report if I saw any signs of movement up above. But the hill-tops remained deserted.

We marched on until pretty late. A hasty camp was pitched and we were told that we should be off very early next morning. So we were. It was on this next day that I learned what had happened at Gyantse, and I was allowed to gather that messages were now being exchanged between Brander and the post at Gyantse, and the news was that the Tibetans had not made any second attempt to attack the camp, but that they were in great force in the fort. It was thought that they would attack us when we were marching into the post. I heard all this with great excitement, I remember, but I do not think it struck anybody that Brander's force was in any real danger then. As a matter of fact, nothing happened, and we marched into the post unmolested.

We could see with our own eyes swarms of Tibetans on the face of the rock and others building up the defences again. The garrison we had left

behind, careful of their ammunition, had not fired upon these people, although they were within rifle range. But Brander could not bear the sight. He ordered fire upon the Tibetans immediately. It was rather funny to see how quickly the ant-like figures on the face of the rock disappeared. Nor were we ever again to see them in the same numbers. They did all the work of rebuilding the defences at night.

Next morning, our post found itself bombarded from the fort. I cannot call it a heavy bombardment. The Tibetans had a couple of cannon which fired solid balls, seven-pound balls I think, and fifty or sixty rifles kept up a persistent fire. Brander was indefatigable. He built up walls; he dug trenches; and in fact he worked his Pioneers until they were tired to death of war. Then to encourage these Mazbi Sikhs he issued an 'order of the day' in which he said of the Pioneers: '*Si monumentum requiris, circumspice.*' The Pioneers already have a good motto of their own: '*Aut viam inveniam, aut faciam.*' This is what I was told. I cannot say whether I ever saw that 'order of the day,' but I was pleased with the story. And here it is in type.

There followed an extraordinary period of comparative peace for about six or seven weeks. We were not quite besieged because the Tibetans were

not successful in an attempt to get behind us; but the attempt was only half-hearted. For some reason they seemed to be quite satisfied at holding us where we were. There was a sort of wood behind the farmhouse which we had fortified, and I used to spend hours under the trees looking at the birds and insects that haunted it. Mounted infantry kept up communications twice a week with General Macdonald at Chumbi, and we got our post quite regularly. The telegraph people established themselves, and I was able to send off as many messages as I liked.

In one way I was rather badly off. I had not been careful enough when the force settled down in Gyantse to get myself admitted as a member of any mess. All the other unattached people had arranged these personal matters before the force left Chumbi; the result was that later on, when I asked whether I could join such and such a mess, I found that all were full up. So I had to live by myself. I found a sort of corner in the farmhouse in which I pitched my tent. It was in the angle between two walls so I was sheltered from the Tibetan fire. My Gurkha servant did the cooking. There was nothing to cook except the meat ration. Yes, we had fresh meat, almost all the time, for a great flock of sheep had been driven up with the troops and grazed happily in the wood I have referred to.

But it must not be supposed that all our days were calm. There were two occasions at least in which it became necessary to dislodge Tibetans who had come down from the fort and occupied farmhouses only a few hundred yards from our farmhouse. In both these cases the only way of getting the Tibetans out was to blow holes in the walls of the farms. The troops would get as close to the farm as possible, and then, under cover of fire from the rest, a small and daring squad would dash forward and get under the wall and lay slabs of guncotton against it. Then they had to rush back again before the guncotton exploded. Mind you, such explosions perhaps only opened the way into one room and not into the whole farm.

The adventure had to be repeated four or five times before the Tibetans were finally driven out of the farm. They were very obstinate and held on as long as possible. Sometimes they ignored the fire of the supporting troops entirely, in order to stop the advance of the party with the explosives. It was on one of these occasions that I saw men with slings on the roof of an outhouse. At first I did not know what they were at, for all I could see was an arm swung violently round and round before the stone was discharged. I am afraid all these men suffered the same fate. You cannot fight bullets with stones. I suppose, in all, ten or twelve charges of guncotton

were laid at different times, and I was full of admiration for the officers and men of the Pioneers who had to carry out this dangerous duty. Very often they were being fired at from an overlooking window at a distance of only twenty or thirty yards.

When the second farmhouse was taken Brander had a trench cut to it from the post, and he occupied both that farm and the other one with as many Gurkhas as he could spare. General Macdonald, down at Chumbi had, I think, very great confidence in Colonel Brander. He might have been annoyed at the risk that was run when we went off to turn the Tibetans out of the pass, but there was no sign that he was ever in the least afraid that the Tibetans would succeed in getting into the post at Gyantse. At any rate, he did not hurry up any reinforcements.

It became known to us that as a consequence of the fighting at Gyantse it had been decided to add more troops to the expedition. Many of these troops I did not see at all, as they were kept on the lines of communication, but we were told that when the time came to push on to Lhasa a British regiment would certainly march with us. This regiment was the Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment). Then we had a British mountain battery, and the 40th Pathans, and a company of mounted infantry which was composed of men drawn from the



**Guides.** These extra troops, of course, had had no provision made for them. Fresh supplies had to be rushed up and stored along the line, and that was perhaps another reason why the little force at Gyantse was left for so long to fend for itself.

Then there came a day when shouting and singing in the fort proclaimed that the Tibetans had received large reinforcements. The fire on the post was redoubled, and the mounted infantry who were keeping communications open reported that they were being sniped at. Once they were actually held up and narrowly escaped massacre. One man was killed. This unfortunate sepoy was the first man whose body had been left in the hands of the Tibetans. They cut off his head and sent it to Lhasa to prove what valiant and successful soldiers they were. On another occasion, the Tibetans laid an ambush for the mounted infantrymen carrying postbags, but somehow we heard about it and a party went out from the farm, drove the Tibetans off and brought the post in.

There was one incident which annoyed everybody. A large number of parcels for individual officers and men had accumulated at Fort Phari. These were despatched one day to Gyantse on mules and ponies provided by a Tibetan contractor and without an escort. The progress of this convoy was very slow but we were informed almost every day

of how far it had come. Then came the day when we should have received our parcels, but they did not arrive. It must have been near sunset when somebody on the roof of the post saw the convoy. It was about eight hundred yards off and making straight for the Tibetan fort. I think if there had been time the troops would have dashed out to try and save those parcels, but there was no time, and the Tibetans had the benefit of the comforts we were expecting.

One day it became known that the General and all the fresh troops had already started from Chumbi and would be in Gyantse in a few days. The Tibetans, of course, had this news also. The fire from the fort redoubled. Those two cannon with their solid cannon balls were at it all day long and we had to be careful and keep under cover.

One afternoon when I was on the roof of the post with several other officers, peering over the parapets, somebody said, 'Do you want to see the Tibetan army in full array?' And he pointed to some foothills on the left. Dusk was just about to fall, and I think the Tibetans thought that they would not be noticed, but we had seen them—bent double, moving along in an endless file, on the way which would cut across the road to the post at a point two or three miles away. Some keen eyes also discovered another Tibetan column moving parallel to

the first one. It dawned upon everyone that the objective of these men was the monastery of Naini, a large building about five or six miles away, commanding the road up which our reinforcements would come.

Brander, as I have said, was a man of decision and resource. He realised at once that these Tibetans were out to stop the march of General Macdonald and his Fusiliers and Pathans. So he determined to get the Tibetans between two fires. Very early next morning we were off to Naini, too. When the walls of the monastery came in sight we found that Macdonald was already engaged. His troops were attempting to get round to the left of the monastery, a manoeuvre which drew all the Tibetans closer into the monastery, leaving the road, by which we were marching, practically clear. In fact, the transport of the reinforcements was able to continue its march and proceeded straight on to Gyantse while the monastery still remained untaken. Brander and his troops proceeded to attack it from the right. The result was that the Tibetans, afraid of being surrounded, poured out and fled along the hills towards the north of Gyantse.

Before the flight started I noticed how gallantly the 40th Pathans had stormed the monastery. Some of the walls were in ruins and others had holes in them made by shells, but the Tibetans were very

obstinate in the way they refused to quit. There was one lot in an outlying building who would not retreat, although a way of escape was open to them. This outbuilding overlooked the road along which the baggage animals were passing, and the Tibetans kept up a persistent fire from it, although the building was being torn to bits by a couple of mountain guns which were finally brought up to within five hundred yards of it. At one time the transport was actually halted in the hope that these few snipers would be dislodged. Finally, as it was getting late, the transport was ordered to move on, sniping or no sniping. The guns were called away also, and with them the troops. I imagine most of the Tibetans in the outbuilding were killed. But any that survived were left alone. Neither we nor the reinforcements wanted to hang about in the dark while this tiny garrison was being finished off.

One little incident of this affair which I remember was meeting a small brisk man in khaki, but evidently a civilian, who came running up to greet me. This was Bertie Barrow, a well-known sporting journalist who had turned war correspondent for the time being. He said he knew nothing about war and talked in a way that made me feel like a veteran campaigner. He was very keen for me to help him in drawing a plan of the battle, but I told him it was not necessary to have a plan.

One cannot telegraph a plan, and for the rest all one has to do is to describe what one has personally seen. Barrow was delighted with this information. He told me the surprising news that Candler, whom we had left so badly wounded at Guru, was coming up again. They had managed to save one hand and he had recovered in the most marvellous way.

There was no room for the reinforcements in the farm, but a camp was pitched a short distance away, out of range of fire from the fort. I don't know why I have continued to use the word 'fort,' when all the time the word in my head has been 'jong'; that is the Tibetan word for a fort and it was used all the time by everybody engaged in the Expedition.

For the next two days the jong was silent, and I imagine the garrison was very busy in further strengthening the defences. I know the General and his staff were busily examining the jong and the approaches to it. An elaborate plan was evolved for the capture of the jong. Behind it ran a long ridge of rock on which were built two monasteries. This ridge was really a portion of the rock, or perhaps it was the other way about; the rock jutted out from the ridge. The General decided that the two monasteries had better be taken first. They seemed to be full of men, and, as it turned out, they were even fuller than was expected. A whole day was allowed for the capture of these two

monasteries, and then the General proposed to set the scene for the great and final assault. The expression 'set the scene' is quite the correct one to use in this connection, for the assault on the jong was about as spectacular an affair as can be imagined, quite as spectacular as the affair at Hot Spring.

The 40th Pathans, I think, were set the task of taking the first monastery. They met with obstinate resistance and lost two officers and I don't know how many men before they succeeded. The 8th Gurkhas were set at the other monastery; they had the same experience as the Pathans. They got the monastery and so reached their objective. I did not climb up with them, but I heard that there was a good deal of bad and broken ground between them and the jong, and I think they were told to remain there for the night, because any withdrawal might have meant the Tibetans occupying the position again in the dark.

Nobody quite knew when the assault on the jong was to take place, but that very night an officer said to me: 'You had better be up early to-morrow morning, or you will miss the sight of your life.' I could get no more out of him, nor was anything to be had from anybody on the staff. So, telling my Gurkha servant to bring me a cup of tea at dawn, I went to bed. He brought the tea before there was any light in the sky, for he said that the troops were

already awake and forming up. I swallowed my cup of tea just as fast as I could and was out in the courtyard in time to see the tail end of a column of troops disappearing out of the gateway. Something delayed me for a minute or two; perhaps I found a bootlace undone; anyway when I reached the gate the troops had gone—vanished into the dark—and I did not know which way they had taken. But it was not very easy to get lost on an occasion like this, because there was the jong, and the troops were going to assault it. So I stumbled on, and soon I passed sepoys and others who were taking up their positions. I did not ask anybody any questions but stumbled straight forward till I could distinguish in the dawn that was breaking the outlines of the jong.

There was no one about at this time, and I thought it would be silly to push on. I might easily have fallen into Tibetan hands. So I decided to wait where I was till it was daylight and I could find something to guide my steps. Sitting there in the fresh dawn I must have fallen asleep, for it was not so cold. Suddenly I was awakened by a tremendous roar. All the Tibetans in the jong were firing off their guns and rifles as fast as they could. The assault had evidently started. It seemed to me that our troops were already at the base of the jong. I went forward cautiously till I discovered that the figures I

was able to see in front were our troops; Fusiliers. Also I could see shells bursting on various points on the jong. I crept forward in order to join the Fusiliers, and soon found myself at a point where further advance was held up. The Tibetans were down at the bottom of the rock in much stronger numbers than had been thought. They kept up an accurate fire which had evidently to be smothered in some way before an advance was possible. I must say I wondered for a long time what the General could do next. The walls at the bottom of the jong were stout and thick; they were manned by stout fellows, and it did not seem as if our mountain guns could make much impression upon them. There was, of course, the old dodge of a small party creeping up to the base of the wall and laying slabs of guncotton against it, but the Tibetans now were in too great numbers to enable that to be done. Any party would have been shot down long before the guncotton was laid and the fuses adjusted.

I must have stayed with the Fusiliers for hours, watching and wondering what was to happen next. Then I saw that the men were taking cover and settling themselves as if for a long wait. Nobody quite knew what was to happen, but I thought it would be a good opportunity to get back to my tent and have some kind of a meal. I did this and noted that the fire from the jong had almost died



away. After eating my meat ration, which my Gurkha brought, I climbed up the wire to the roof of the post, where I found several officers eagerly watching the jong. They had seen less than I had and pounced upon me for news. They were unable to leave the post because they had been left there to garrison it with a few men while the battle was in progress. I told them what I had seen and then said that I was going out to see more and that I was very sorry for them who could see so little.

This time I left the post by way of the trench which Brander had dug to the other farm which we had taken some weeks previously. Here I found the General and his staff. They seemed to be waiting for something to happen. I had learned by this time that one should not ask for information while a battle is in progress, but I noted that the staff had taken up a position from which a very good view of the whole front of the jong could be obtained. Straight in front of us was that fissure in the rock which I have mentioned before. At two different points walls had been built across it. 'Aha,' I thought, 'that's where the real assault is to take place.'

But there were no signs of anything happening, so I went back to the spot I had reached before. I found that, during my absence, the troops had gone forward a bit. For some reasons the Tibetans had


abandoned the lowest wall and also some buildings at the base of it. There were some Gurkhas there, and they told me, with a grin, that when they first got to this wall, one of them, finding a door in one of the outbuildings closed, had pushed it open to go in. It swung inwards; so did he, for the room was full of Tibetans who dragged him in with them. His shouts were unheard, but instead of killing him the Tibetan soldiers said they had been ordered to stay there to the death, but they did not want to die, they wanted to surrender. Would he go out again and tell his officer that? So he came out, and, on an officer coming up and shouting through the door, they all came out, twenty or thirty of them, and laid down their arms. A few had rifles, the rest had prong-guns, and all had swords. There were a great many other outhouses of this kind studded along the base of the wall. They only had one exit and that was outwards, so the soldiers placed in them had no means of retreat.

That is a very old Mongol idea. Any ruler who wanted to be absolutely safe thought he could not do better than build barracks for his soldiers on the outer side of the ramparts. They could not then fly inside in order to escape an enemy, but would have to fight to the death. I have seen such barracks, or rather shelters for troops, myself, in old forts in India. These outbuildings of Gyantse Jong seemed

to have been newly erected like the wall itself. Some of them had no roof.

Poking into one or two myself I found a slightly superior hut, evidently meant for an officer. It had a sort of rough bed with a blanket on it, on the top of which rested a lovely dagger attached to a belt. 'Finders, losers, keepers,' was the expression that came into my mind. I picked up this belt and attached it to myself.

Swaggering out with this belt, I learned that preparations were in progress for a great assault on the jong, and that the Gurkhas, with whom I was now, had been given the task of climbing up that fissure. They were waiting for the mountain guns to cover their advance. These guns were now taking up new positions. It struck me that I would not be able to see the assault from the bottom of the rock. The best place would be the spot which the General and his staff had occupied. So back I went there. The spot was actually the roof of the farm at the end of Brander's trench. I climbed up and nobody told me to go away. As a matter of fact several members of the Mission were there, as well as the General and his staff. From their remarks I gathered that the assault was about to begin. I heard Colonel Iggulden give an order to the effect that the machine guns were to be brought up as close to the jong as possible.



Then suddenly, there was an outburst of fire along the whole face of the jong. I think the Fusiliers were then making an attack on the right of it where an ascent of some kind may have been possible. The Gurkhas had not yet started. Next, the mountain batteries began to shell those two walls across the fissure which I have mentioned before. I learned then that common shell was being used as being the best means of knocking down walls. Shrapnel is no use at all for this purpose, and common shell had been brought up especially to batter the jong. The battery seemed to make very good practice, for we could actually see the shells hitting the wall and making holes in it.

I suppose the battery had been firing for about half an hour when a tremendous explosion took place in the interior of the jong. The Tibetans, of course, were using gunpowder in their prong-guns and I suppose a dozen barrels or so had gone up together. I do not know what effect this explosion had on the morale of the defenders, but their fire seemed to be as vigorous as ever. Possibly the explosion did not do very much damage. Gunpowder always explodes in the direction of the least resistance. I suppose most of it went up in the air.

Suddenly I heard someone cry: 'The Gurkhas have started.' I had, at the time, in my possession what was known as a binocular-telescope. Why

they are not made nowadays I do not know. This powerful glass had an 18 magnification; the field was small and it took a little time to get on to any object, but once there the vision was quite clear. It was with this glass that I watched the Gurkhas climb up that fissure.

The first wall was easily scaled because it had been battered to bits by the artillery. The next one, about forty or sixty feet higher, offered more obstacles to the attackers, not that there were no gaping holes in it, but it was defended by as stout a company of Tibetans as you can imagine. They lined what was left of the wall, not only with rifles, but with every kind of firearm, and with them were about a dozen or twenty men who were occupied with nothing but throwing boulders and stones down at the attackers. I turned my glasses for a while on these people. It was like looking at a close-up at a cinema. We were not more than five or six hundred yards from the jong, if even that, so it was quite possible to see what was going on very well indeed, even with the naked eye. The General had his famous telescope, and even he sometimes joined in the exclamations of the others.

While this assault was going on it was no longer necessary for anybody watching to keep under cover, for the Tibetans were too occupied in repelling the attackers to worry about onlookers. You must note

that the climb the Gurkhas were attempting was real rock climbing. They had to get up by catching hold of projections, putting their feet into crevices and helping each other up. One or two men had slung their rifles and were making their way up hand over hand. Some were lending their shoulders to others. Why they were not all swept away by the rain of missiles that was being poured down upon them I don't quite know, but I suppose the defenders could not see them very well, and the rocks that were hurled went bounding over their heads.

Presently the exclamations by the watchers seemed to centre round one figure. It was the figure of a British officer who was leading the men. The cries were about his name. No one seemed quite to know who he was. I heard several names, I think, and then it was the General himself who said: 'I can see him quite clearly. He is Grant of the Gurkhas.'

Suddenly there was a sort of groan from the spectators. I had seen a Tibetan, his face contorted with passion, show himself in the centre of the broken wall; over his head he carried a great boulder which he hurled down straight at Grant. The boulder did not strike him directly, but hit a rock first and then struck Grant a glancing blow. He lost his hold and was sent hurtling down. By an

amazing chance he was caught on a ledge, and before he could fall farther two or three Gurkhas had got hold of him. Our relief was presently turned to amazement when we saw that Grant again was painfully pushing his way up at the head of the attackers. Perhaps it was the spectacle of this man emerging as it were from death back into life that caused the heart of the defenders to fail, for they abandoned the wall. I saw their heads disappear one by one, and presently the Gurkhas were climbing up faster than before. They had no more missiles to face. Then Grant hoisted himself over what was left of the wall, and we saw his men follow him, one by one. They disappeared from sight.

The next thing was that we heard a furious rifle fire from the right side of the jong. Apparently the whole garrison was off and was coming under the fire of our flank attack. Well I remember how the General turned away from his telescope and said: 'Well, gentlemen, I think it is all over.' It was all over. The burst of firing died away and everything was quiet.

Then I thought of my duty to my news agency and newspapers. I dashed back to my tent and to paper and pencil. On my way I met a member of the Mission who was carrying what looked like two bottles of champagne. He was on his way to the General and it struck me that if I had thought less of

my duty and more of my thirst I would have gone back with the champagne. But my sense of duty prevailed and so I was unable to drink the General's health.

Occasionally while I was writing I heard a little rifle fire, and sometimes I thought the mountain battery was still in action. Evidently the fort was being cleared up, but the Tibetans had no fight left in them, and we held possession of the jong without any further trouble.

The next few days were spent in thoroughly destroying that jong. I have said that when we first came bits of it were dismantled, but this time the jong and walls and everything else were blown to pieces. If the Tibetans wanted to make use of that rock again they would have to build an entirely new fort. While the fort was being destroyed all the talk was about whether we were going on to Lhasa or not. Some officers knew for a fact that we were not going on, because of the transport difficulties; others were just as certain that we were going on because Lord Curzon was determined to sign a treaty at Lhasa and nowhere else. Candler came up, minus one hand, and he told me that we were going on, and he had had that news from a source so high that he did not dare to mention it.

Then it came to be known that the Tibetan



Government of Lhasa had sent a messenger to say that they were prepared to negotiate a treaty. Our hopes of getting to Lhasa fell very low when we heard this, but we cheered up again when it was stated that the readiness of the Dalai Lama to negotiate a treaty was qualified by a demand that before anything could be done we should retire to the Indian frontier. That would, of course, be equivalent to admitting defeat and certainly the whole frontier would consider that the Tibetans had won; besides, having gone back, what guarantee had we that the Tibetans would sign anything? The general opinion at Gyantse was that we would go on, though there were those who said that if the difficulties of transport increased we might be content to sign the treaty some marches short of Lhasa. The members of the Mission were not forthcoming about the nature of the letters that were passing between the Government of India and the Dalai Lama, but I gathered that the Dalai Lama remained obstinate in his demand that we should go back. He said that such a thing had never been heard of, that people should come to him with demands. The rule was that they could only come to Lhasa in order to pay their respects and receive his blessing. 'If you have a request to make, make it from a proper distance.' That was the tenor of the Dalai Lama's messages. But all we really knew was that some

high Tibetan officials had arrived at Gyantse and that letters were passing to and fro.

Then one day everybody was excited to hear that in a short time we would be off on our travels again. Transport was allotted to various units and officers. I learned with pleasure that I would have two mules to myself. This would enable me to carry my tent as well as a big roll of bedding and clothes. As a matter of fact, I found that my stuff did not weigh so very much, so I was able to take two tents, that is to say a 40-pounder for myself and a shuldari for my servants. But we did not start on the day appointed because it rained the night before and the transport people thought it better to let the tents dry before a move was made.

There was probably a good deal of talk before it was finally decided who was to go to I hasa and who was not. The troops that had borne the burden and heat of the day (or at any rate, if one cannot talk of the heat of the day in Tibet, the troops who had borne the burden of the fighting) naturally thought they should be selected. The new troops thought they should be selected because they had done the same amount of marching as the others and had seen no action. In the end the General decided that the Gurkhas and the Pioneers were to go in any case; also the British regiment. The 40th Pathans were to come a part of the way. Of course the guns were

to go where the Mission went. Not all the correspondents were permitted to go up. There were several people who told me that the General had decided to give some of the new correspondents a chance, so I was relieved when I heard that I, at any rate, was not to be sent back.

This seems a good point at which to terminate my narrative about Tibet. Have I nothing then to say about Lhasa? I could write volumes and volumes about Lhasa, but this is a book about fighting and I was not to see any more fighting in Tibet. Why not? Because there was none. But fighting or no fighting, Lhasa cannot be ignored.

The column proceeded steadily day after day. People have an idea that Tibet is a vast plateau, but the plain places are few and far between. The greater part of the country is a tumbled mass of mountains. The column worked its way along a road which either defiled through gorges or wound its way round the base of mountains. In one or two places wooden bridges over torrents had been destroyed, but there was no destruction which presented difficulties the Pioneers and Sappers were unable to overcome.

At the end of every march we were met by a deputation of Tibetan officials who implored us to go back at once. Were we mad to continue to defy the Dalai Lama's orders? After a time I got to

know the faces of these high officials quite well. The same people met us every time. They would pack up very early in the morning before we started, and be ready to greet us at the end of the day's march. They always said the same thing and always got the same reply: 'We are going to Lhasa to negotiate a treaty, and our orders are to negotiate it there and nowhere else.'

## LHASA UNVEILED

This is not a narrative of travel, so I will not dwell upon the march, but we crossed glaciers and then moved for days along the banks of that wonderful lake nowadays called Yamdok, though in older maps it is marked Paltu. This enormous sheet of water is more an inland sea than a lake. It has never been surveyed, and so it is impossible to say how big it really is. But it fills up all the bays and inlets of a range of mountains; that is to say, it is a curious shape. A drawing of it would present a picture like that of a crab, with all its claws and legs and whiskers displayed.

It was wonderful marching along the bank because the waters of the lake were never still. I saw several waterspouts form on the lake and burst; there were sudden storms which lashed the lake into fury. Nowhere were there any signs of boats, though there were villages at intervals by the side of the water, but whether the people fished in the lake or not I do not know. If they had boats they concealed them. The Expedition had brought up half

a dozen canvas boats in the charge of Attock boatmen. Some of these boats were launched on the lake, but I think it was found that the Expedition moved quicker if the boats were carried.

Then one day we came to an obstacle which everybody had dreaded. This was the climb up from the lake to the top of the pass which led down to the San-po. That pass according to all reports had to be crossed in one day. There was no camping anywhere near the top because of the fierce winds that blew up there. An early start was made and I remember that being full of youth and pride I decided that I would not use my pony. I told my servant he could ride it. By a lucky chance the day turned out to be what the Tibetans call 'a golden day.' There was no wind. I found that by making frequent halts I could get along quite well. Moreover, the slope was not so steep as we had been told. In fact, at many places I was able to leave the path and walk across the country, as it were.

At the top of the pass I must admit my heart sank. The rest of the march was to be downhill. Yes, I was not afraid of the downhill, though it seemed to be a wearisome distance from the top of the pass to that line shining in the sun which showed the course of the San-po. What I was afraid of was the day when, on our return, we would have to climb up that side from the San-po. The path down was

very steep, and everybody, mules and all, slithered down a large part of the way.

The next step was the crossing of the San-po. This river, many people will know, and just as many will not, is the same as the Brahmaputra of India. Even up in Tibet it is a broad and swift and majestic river. There was a time, perhaps centuries ago, when the river on this very road to Lhasa was spanned by a chain bridge. There was a rock in the middle of the river to which two sets of chains had been attached. One chain was still there. Nobody knew who had put it up or when and how the bridge was destroyed. In these days the river is crossed by ferry boats. There were two ferry boats, built of wood. It was thought that when we reached the crossing point the boats would be at the other side, but our mounted infantry, as the result of a daring night march, was able to seize the boats long before the Tibetans had expected any of our troops to arrive.

The boatmen ferried the troops across. I do not suppose they liked doing it, as the work was very tedious and hard, and each boat could only take twenty or thirty men at a time. An attempt was made to use the canvas boats to transport troops. Two or three were lashed together and a raft made, but one raft got into a swirl and a drowning accident took place. The officer drowned was Major

Bretherton, Chief Transport Officer with the Expedition, a valuable soldier whose death was a great loss, not merely to the Expedition, but to the army.

But I am not going to dwell on this crossing or the march that followed. The nearer we got to Lhasa the greater the number of villages and the signs of cultivation as the country grew less rugged. Well I remember the day when we were told that the next morning we would probably catch a sight of Lhasa and of the Pota-la. I rode out early in the morning to get a first glimpse of the mysterious city, and sure enough there was a point from which the cupolas of the Pota-la could be plainly seen. These were supposed to be coated with gold, and certainly they shone like gold. Others who were with me said that they could see figures moving about on the roof, and it was then that I was told by a member of the Mission that news had reached them the night before that the Dalai Lama had fled. To the last he had been ordering us to go back. He was a man of great decision of character, and much feared in Tibet. We did not know whether the attitude of the inhabitants would alter now that he had gone. I thought that there would be more fighting, and I remember sitting for a long time gazing at the Pota-la and wondering whether it would have to be stormed in the way the jong at Gyantse had been.



While I was looking at the Pota-la, Perceval Landon came up, and, being in a sprightly mood, I told him that I had already sent off a description of Lhasa. He was furious, because *The Times* was very keen on getting in first with a description of the Forbidden City. Landon said that he would tell everybody in Fleet Street that I was not to be trusted, and he would take good care that I was never put on to a war again. A few days afterwards I had to tell him that I had not got ahead with my description of Lhasa. That annoyed him again, but it was rather stupid of me to tell a story like that, because later on I was told that I had actually done the thing I had accused myself of doing.

However, let us get on. Our approach to Lhasa was very slow. That daily deputation did not meet us this time when we camped six or seven miles from the town. Next morning we were moving forward, with every precaution against an attack or ambuscade, through fairly level country, when we met a deputation. It consisted of ten or twelve horsemen and a few footmen, and the head of it was not a Tibetan at all, but a Nepalese. He was the Nepalese Envoy at Lhasa. The Tibetans had not interfered with him at all, and he told us that the city and the Pota-la were in a state of confusion owing to the flight of the Dalai Lama, with whom had gone some of the most prominent men in

**Tibet.** But a Council of Regency had been formed and it had asked the Envoy to come out and meet us and tell us that in view of the flight of the Dalai Lama a treaty could be negotiated. Apparently, the Dalai Lama having gone, there was no religious objection to our being at Lhasa. The Tibetan people could treat with us when he, the Dalai Lama, could not, being too high a personage to have any dealings with foreigners.

We then marched on with greater confidence, and as we neared the city it became evident that there was to be no fighting. Tibetans, men, women and children, appeared on the road and seemed to be very interested in us: there was no animosity in their behaviour. We camped on the first day out of rifle range of the Pota-la, but on the next day, seeing how friendly everybody was, arrangements were made for the camp to be pitched on a drier and more pleasant spot which was called the 'Field of Wild Asses.' There were two wild asses there.

Wild asses, which are more like wild ponies than asses, are very numerous in Tibet; they are to be found in large companies in the less hilly parts of the country. At first herds of kyang, as they are called, were mistaken for Tibetan cavalry because of the dust they raise when they are off at a wild gallop. They suffer from a great curiosity and would come trotting up to our mounted infantry

scouts, gaze at them for a minute or two and then turn and bolt as fast as they could. The two wild asses that lived in the field where we pitched our camp did not desert it because we were there. They went and lived amongst the mules and shared their meals, but they would not allow anybody to touch them. Both were finally secured one day and were ultimately tamed. One was unfortunately drowned when crossing the Brahmaputra on our return journey. The other, I believe, was sent to England and put in Regent's Park.

Though the Council of Regency professed a desire to treat with us, when it came to making a treaty all kinds of difficulties arose. Everybody was still afraid of the Dalai Lama. What would happen when he came back? Days and days passed while long discussions took place between Young-husband and the members of the Council. While this was going on, everybody had the freedom of the city. We were not permitted into the Pota-la, but for the rest anybody could go where he would; at least, I was never told to keep within any particular part, and I went into the city almost every day to have a look at things; and although I was stared at there was never any sign of objection to my presence.

Another way of learning something about the Tibetans was provided by an open-air market that

was started just outside the camp. Tibetans of both sexes established themselves every morning with things for sale. Very seldom were any edibles offered. The articles spread out before the vendors were trinkets of various kinds, images and little household implements, like cooking pots and spoons. The troops had nothing to spend their money on when they left India, and here was an opportunity of buying something in Lhasa itself, something that could be taken home and cherished as a curiosity. So the Tibetans, that is to say the civil population of Lhasa, did a very good trade, ransacking their homes for things they could sell to us. Some pottery and silver-ware and enamel and jewels were of a really valuable kind. These things for the greater part had nothing to do with Tibet at all. They had come from Peking, and the Tibetans themselves insisted on their Chinese origin.

This market went on merrily for weeks, and then one day a tragedy took place which might have altered the whole situation for us and for the Tibetans. A monk of one of the two great monasteries appeared in the camp market and attacked a medical officer with a sword. The officer received a severe cut on the head, but the monk was soon secured by the troops. This incident caused all the Tibetans in the market to pick up their goods and

run away. The monk was formally tried by a court martial next day and was hanged publicly a few hours after the trial concluded. There was no market that day, but the Tibetans came out in large numbers to witness the execution.

The Council of Regency expressed its regret at the incident but hoped that the market would be allowed to continue. They said they would send their own police to see that no other assaults took place. We agreed to this but added that the monastery to which the monk belonged must pay a large fine. The Council objected to this, saying that the monastery could not afford it. To this Younghusband replied that if the fine were not paid our troops would go to the monastery and take it. Indeed, next day the troops set out.

I forget which of the two monasteries, Sera or Depong, was responsible for this business, but it was an enormous building, containing ten or twelve thousand monks, situated on a hill two or three miles from Lhasa. As we approached it no signs of life could be seen, but when we were about six or seven hundred yards away the monks poured out from a gateway in their thousands, and lined up. Our mountain guns got into action and the troops deployed. Everyone thought there would be a fight, and although we were outnumbered twenty or thirty to one, I felt rather sorry for these Tibetan

monks, who evidently had no idea about the effect of modern firearms, or they would not have come out into the open in masses and so presented us with targets that could not be missed. The slaughter at Guru would have been nothing compared with what would have happened under the walls of the monastery if fire had been opened.

But fire was not opened. A deputation of monks, headed by the Abbot, came down the hill. The deputation said that the monastery had not absolutely refused to pay the fine. What had been said was that the treasury in the monastery did not have enough money in it to meet our demands. Would we accept the rest of the fine in kind. The monastery possessed a store of valuable silks and embroideries and these could be taken over at a valuation. To this Younghusband agreed, and in due course there emerged from the monastery monks carrying a certain amount of silver, and a number of bales of embroidered silks.

These garments were afterwards sold in the camp by auction. I bought a lovely silk robe myself. The officer who had been attacked followed the negotiations about an indemnity very closely. I think he half believed that a large part of the indemnity, if that is the correct word to use, would be given to him. 'Blood money,' he styled it. But he was disappointed because he was told that the wound

he had received was in the natural course of his duties and the money would all go to the Government. Everybody called it a bleeding shame.

The incident of the monastery did not alter our relations with the rest of the Tibetan population at Lhasa. They were the same as before, and the market thrived as merrily as ever. I was much interested in the policemen sent down by the Council of Regency to keep order. They were not Tibetans at all, but Chinese. I think it was the presence of these Chinese policemen that led me to ask questions about Chinese influence in Lhasa. I then learned, to my surprise, that prior to our arrival the Chinese Depon in Lhasa was a very important man indeed with big powers. He had his own police and a body of troops as an escort. These troops he had sent out of Lhasa when the arrival of the Expedition was imminent. The police had stayed, and the Council of Regency depended on them to maintain order, not only in the market but all over Lhasa. These policemen were very rough with the Tibetans. They carried canes with which they whipped people without any provocation. Several times in the city I saw Chinamen, who did not seem to have any kind of rank, spit at Tibetans in order to make them stand off. In fact, the Chinese in Lhasa, during the days of the Mission, were undoubtedly the dominant race.

They were feared and did as they liked. So it was evident that the Chinese claim that Tibet was a vassal to China had some substance.

But I seem to be keeping away from a description of Lhasa. What about this mysterious city? What was it like? Was it a romantic town or merely a collection of huts in a remote and a desert place? I will try to tell you. Leaving aside the Pota-la for the moment, my first impression of Lhasa itself was that of a town which resembled in many ways a cantonment in India. Each house was surrounded by a wall. There were the same dusty roads and the same meandering kind of traffic along them. The houses were built of stone, and there was a sort of market with shops opening into a square. Outside these shops booths were erected in which wares of different kinds were displayed by villagers who had come into town. The buildings were mostly of the bungalow type, but the houses in the market square were of two storeys. All the buildings were stout buildings, and I got the impression that they were meant to withstand mighty rushing winds tearing down the hillside.

But in any town the people are more interesting than the buildings they inhabit. One terrible eyesore in Lhasa is the number of beggars. That is the case almost everywhere in Tibet, and I rather think that a large proportion of the population, whether



they are professional beggars or not, beg from strangers.

The professional beggars are as bold and mischievous as monkeys. They did not dare to come near the camp bazaar, particularly after the Chinese police arrived, but in the town itself they were an intolerable nuisance. Many of the countrymen selling their wares in the market-place had a naked sword by their sides, with which they did not scruple to slash at any beggars that came near them. The beggars hopped about like crows just out of reach of the swords.

The most repulsive of the beggars belonged to a class called 'Aghores' I hope what I am about to relate will not make the ordinary reader queasy. These Aghores lived in dwellings made out of the horns and skulls of yaks. There was a butchery four or five miles outside Lhasa, which was run by Aghores, and almost every day fresh yak meat was brought into Lhasa. There will be an outcry ! What, meat sold in Lhasa, a Buddhist capital and in a country where it is considered a sin to eat flesh ? That is so. It is a scandal. The Tibetans admitted it and then, they added, the meat was taken up into the Pota-la. Anyway the Aghores who killed the yaks were considered horrible people, beyond the pale.

Is this the horror I mentioned ? No. Worse is to

come. Aghores had other occupations. It was their business to cut up the bodies of the dead. It is the Tibetan habit when anybody dies to cut the flesh off the corpse and then to leave it and the bones to the dogs that prowl around. In some parts by the great lakes they do no more than cut off the head, and leave the dogs and fishes to do the rest; but these are parts in which there are no Aghores to cut up the dead.

The Aghora is a Mongolian cult which, at one time, was spread into parts of India, though it is very many years since any Aghore was heard of in that country. These people are referred to in *The Arabian Nights*. Aghorism at one time took the terrible form of eating the bodies of the dead, and in India, and I suppose elsewhere, Aghores used to dig up buried bodies and eat them. I do not think the cult now reaches these extreme forms, even in Tibet, a country where the most sickening things are sometimes done by people who assert they are actuated only by religious motives.

Without being of a morbid frame of mind myself, I went once to a place outside the city where the so-called funerals were conducted. Luckily there was no funeral ceremony going on when I was there, but I saw a great stone slab and a mob of mongrel dogs. I was told the correct course for a visitor was to lie on the slab and roll up and down it,

but I refused to do this, and I do not think any of the party was surprised.

Outside the market, there were only one or two places of interest in Lhasa itself. One was the great Jokang or temple. It was a solidly built stone edifice of no particular architectural beauty. Within the temple were a collection of rooms housing a great variety of gigantic images, vividly painted and clothed in gorgeous garments. There were indications that some of the robes had been removed from the images. I think this was a precaution against possible looting in the event of fighting. Perhaps some of the jewels had been taken away by the Dalai Lama when he fled.

This temple gave one an impression of peace and quiet, unlike the average Tibetan temple or monastery, which is always full of monks who are for ever noisily chanting and praying.

Another place of interest was the house of the chief magician. It was designed to terrify people, and certainly the objects in it were of a very unpleasant character – mummified remains of all kinds and, hanging from the walls, human skins. But I will not go into the horrors with which the chief magician had surrounded himself. I was told that no women were permitted to worship there, on the ground that their nerves were not strong enough to survive the sight of the magical exhibits.

For my part I do not much desire to see them again.

One day when I was in the market in the city a sort of tumult arose and the shopkeepers closed their shops and the country people in the square outside gathered up their wares and hastily put them away into bags and bundles. I thought at the time that our camp had been attacked, and one or two officers who were with me thought the same thing. We decided we had better hurry back to the camp. It would, we thought, not do us any good to be trapped in the city. Nobody took any notice of us as we walked rapidly away from the square. On the way we met an interpreter belonging to the Mission, and he told us that the people were shouting that the Mongolians had arrived.

Now I must tell you that shortly after we reached Lhasa word came that several thousand Mongolians were camped thirty or forty miles away. These nomads, it was said, belonged to tribes that were accustomed to spend the winter at Lhasa. They were supposed to be well armed, and the Council of Regency at Lhasa had been told to inform them that they were not to enter the Lhasa Valley till we had completed the treaty and had gone. The interpreter, who was really the servant of somebody in the Mission, said the report that the Mongolians were coming down was all nonsense, and the market

would be opened again as soon as the shopkeepers recovered from their silly panic.

I decided to go back with this man and was glad I did so, because I saw something which was both novel and interesting in itself and which explained how the panic had started. We saw careering down a street a mob of forty or fifty riderless horses, and they were being driven by two Mongolian girls riding astride without saddles and shouting and screaming at the animals. I do not know what the idea was, or where the horses were being taken, but I can quite understand how the sight of these horses coming full tilt down the street would alarm and excite townspeople.

Sometimes, instead of going into the city I would wander about in what one might call the suburbs. They grow both wheat and oats in Lhasa, but the crops had been cut by the time we arrived, and there seemed to be nothing doing in the way of farming. There were very few trees. Such as there were were carefully preserved. It was considered a sin, punishable by death, to cut down a tree in the Lhasa Valley.

Once in the course of our rambles an officer of the Fusiliers and I found on a small hill an apricot tree, loaded with fruit, ripe for plucking. We had a good feast before we left it. Some Tibetans watched us and shook their heads. The tree was obviously

under a curse of some kind, but we did not suffer from any after-effects.

On other occasions I sat with Candler in a grove of willows, below which flowed a sluggish stream. The willows were so interlaced that it was easy enough to find a soft perch. Candler was now busy writing that famous book of his, *The Unveiling of Lhasa*. He was very clever in managing his paper and pencil with only one hand. He wrote on odd scraps of paper and even on the edges of newspapers, and it struck me that his printers would have some difficulty with his copy when it came to setting it up. I had promised to write for him one or two chapters dealing with the fighting at Gyantse while he was away owing to his wounds. I wrote these chapters, too, amongst the willows, Candler urging me all the while to avoid journalese. I avoided it so well that when the book was published one reviewer contrasted my 'sober narrative' with Candler's 'turgid journalese'. Years and years afterwards, during the Great War I was able to remind Candler about this, and he was not best pleased.

Occasionally I went out shooting with Candler. I had my Winchester and he carried a shotgun which he managed quite cleverly. We were told that orders had been issued forbidding shooting on the ground that it would antagonise the country people. But as we were not officially informed

about such an order we took no notice of it, and so far from the country people being annoyed, the trouble was to keep them from joining us. Although they objected to killing animals themselves they did not mind them being killed by others. If a duck or a goose fell there was always a rush to pick it up, but the bird was seldom brought back to us. The man or boy who got it would leg across the country with it. He was taking it home to have a feed, and we would suffer in the hereafter for having killed it.

The streams and marshes of Lhasa were full of fish - strange fish with large round spots on them. They looked diseased but I don't think they were really. In any case no one fished, because it is an even greater crime in Tibet to kill a fish than to kill a bird or a beast. A member of one of the Mount Everest Expeditions told me once that permission for his expedition to enter Tibet was held back for a year because a monk in the Bhong Valley had killed and eaten a fish. Several months after this terrible deed had been done the Dalai Lama fell ill; magicians and soothsayers could find no cause for this illness till word of what had happened in Bhong was brought to Lhasa. Then, of course, they knew and the whole region at Bhong was closed to strangers lest another fish be slain.

And while we amused ourselves as best we could,

daily interviews and long discussions were taking place between Colonel Younghusband and the Council of Regency. The discussions were held in a sort of villa about a mile distant from the camp. The Mission occupied the villa, and every day high Tibetan officials rode between it and the Pota-la. One morning I was told that there was to be a kind of ceremony at the villa. One of the points in dispute between the British and the Tibetan Governments was the release of two British subjects, Sikhimese, who had been imprisoned as spies in Lhasa two years before. These unfortunate men had been kept all this time in a cellar into which no light was allowed to penetrate. The Tibetans said that the men had been imprisoned long before there had been any dispute about other matters with the Indian Government. Therefore, their case could not be brought up. Our reply was: 'Nonsense! These men are British subjects and the fact that they have been imprisoned for so long makes your case not better but worse.'

Finally the Tibetans gave in, and the ceremony was to take the form of the two men being brought to the villa by Tibetan officials and then formally released before spectators. When I got to the villa the Tibetan official party with the prisoners had not arrived. There was some talk about the prisoners having died under the treatment to which they were



subjected. People were wondering what excuse the Tibetan Government was going to make. There was a discussion between one or two Tibetan officials who had come on ahead; they were being warned that if it were found that the prisoners had been ill-treated it would be the worse for the Tibetan Government.

'How are you going to find out whether the prisoners have been ill-treated or not? They are certain to tell lies,' said the Tibetan officials.

'We will have them examined by our doctors, was our reply.

To this the Tibetans said: 'If there is going to be any examination by your doctors, then our medical men must be present also to see that the examination is conducted fairly.'

Younghusband smiled at this, but admitted that the point was well made.

Then there was a stir and the members of the Council of Regency came in and with them were the two prisoners. They were small men, like most Sikhimese. They had a strange, pallid look, such as one might expect from men who had been kept in total darkness for several years. They blinked their eyes and stumbled in their walk. New clothing had evidently been given to them. They were asked by O'Connor whether they had been ill-treated and they said that they had not been ill-treated, and

added that, being prisoners, they had not expected to be well fed, but they had been given enough to eat.

The Tibetan officials were well pleased when they heard these replies. The two Sikhimese were handed over to the care of the servants of the Mission and the ceremony was at an end. There was nothing more to be said. I spoke to these two men afterwards, and they said they had nothing to grumble about, nor were they very indignant at the way in which they had been treated. I did not ask them the direct question, but I rather think they were spies of the Indian Government.

Then the day came when we were told that negotiations were at an end. The Council of Regency had obtained permission from the Chinese Government to make a treaty, and were prepared to do so. There was a hitch for a few days, because the Council did not want the treaty to be signed in the Pota-la, but Younghusband insisted on that. Finally the Tibetans gave in on the condition that the party that was to witness the ceremony and the members of the Mission themselves were not to enter the Pota-la by the grand staircase. When asked why not, they replied that a portrait of the Empress Dowager of China hung on the staircase and it was not meet that people of other races should gaze on the portrait. Younghusband laughed at this but said that he would not worry about the matter. So

when the treaty was signed we marched by a side entrance into the room that had been prepared.

Now let me tell you about the Pota-la, the very centre of Lamaism in the East. I do not know whether the term is used of the rock or of the palace that is built on it. Mind you, I am only guessing, but I would say that the base of the rock is five or six hundred yards one way, and about ten or twelve hundred the other way. Almost every inch of the surface of the rock is covered by the building, which rises tier on tier to the heavens. I cannot attempt to say what the height of the topmost cupola is from the base, but some of the walls seemed to be almost a hundred feet high, and I suppose there are about six tiers of walls. Some of the highest walls are absolutely sheer and have no windows in them at all. In fact, in the whole building the windows are so few that it is to be wondered how those living inside get light and air.

There was a small winding road up one face of the rock, and we went up that; then through a big door into what looked like a tunnel. It was not really a tunnel but merely a passage. There were high walls on each side and a roof on top. At intervals were posted Tibetans with torches; without the torches we should have been in total darkness. I wonder if it struck anybody that the fifty or sixty of us who were walking along the passage might be walking

into a trap. The Tibetans had only to close the doors at each end and we were done. Then I remembered that when we came up the hill our mountain battery had come into action at the base of it, and there were other troops about. Obviously that was some kind of a precaution. I have no doubt the troops had their instructions as to what to do in case the party did not return within a reasonable time. Another consoling thought was that Younghusband was too wise and foreseeing a man to allow his Mission and the General and his staff, not to mention other people of importance, to enter the Pota-la without taking the precaution of holding some high Tibetan officials as hostages in our camp.

Whether this was done or not I do not know. I did not mention my thoughts and fears to anybody, and nobody mentioned such thoughts to me. Perhaps I was alone in thinking treachery might be intended: those passages were ominous in the flickering torchlight.

The procession finally turned a corner, and we found ourselves in a room of which nearly the whole of one side was open to the air. It was a very deep room, and there was not so much light as might have been expected, considering how wide the window was. The three other sides were blank walls. There were chairs for spectators and a table on which two copies of the treaty were laid out and

pen and ink and sealing wax. Speeches of some kind were made before the actual signatures were affixed, and during the speeches Tibetan servants went round with refreshments, which consisted of dried apricots and some kind of sweet cakes. There was nothing to drink, I regret to say.

The signatures were being written when a startling thing happened. There was a flash of light, a report and then a blinding glare, in the light of which I saw a number of pallid and frightened faces. Then came a cloud of smoke. Everybody had half-risen from their seats, but no word was said. The smoke cleared away pretty quickly, and then we saw that the interruption had been caused by that Tibetan expert, Colonel Waddell, who had managed to bring a camera with him and had lit a magnesium flash. I was told that both Younghusband and the General were very angry with him for not telling them what he was going to do. The Tibetans might have then been warned as to what was about to happen. As it was, they might have been panic-stricken and have charged us with treachery and heaven knows what. There might easily have been fighting. Luckily, after a minute or two, the room was still again. The smoke disappeared, and the Tibetans, reassured, became all smiles once more. I wonder if that photograph was a success. I have never seen any reproduction of it.

The signing being over, one copy of the treaty was rolled up and handed to Younghusband, while the Té Rimpoché took the other. The Té Rimpoché is the name given to the President of the Executive Council in Lhasa. The members of the Council are called Shapés. Of course, we called them 'Shapes,' in one syllable and without any accent. The Fusiliers went about quoting these lines:

In shadow-land, in no-man's land  
Two dreadful Shapes met face to face  
And bade each other stand.

There was nothing to keep us in that bare room in the Pota-la after the treaty had been signed, and we made haste to get out of it, having, alas, seen practically nothing of the interior of the Pota-la and none of its glories.

There was now nothing to keep us in Lhasa. The terms of the treaty were kept secret from the correspondents, but we were able to guess that the Tibetans had agreed to all the British demands, which now included the right to keep a British Agent ('hereinafter to be called the Trade Agent') at Gyantse, with an escort, and also to keep a small garrison in the Chumbi Valley till an indemnity had been paid.

There was a delay of a few days before arrangements could be completed to roll up the Expedition,

and the General thought this would be a good opportunity to purchase a certain amount of warm clothing in Lhasa. Warm cloth there was in plenty, but it was not made up, so a number of Tibetan women were engaged to make big coats for the troops.

Then, in order to celebrate the signing of the treaty, the Mission decided to distribute alms to beggars, each man, woman and child getting sixpence. They rolled up in hundreds and hundreds on the given day, and were seated in rows on a sandy part of the Lhasa plain. At the very outset this trouble arose, that, as soon as the beggars in one row had got their money, they all dashed round to the back and formed another row. Finally there was no more money left. I rather think that every beggar got his dole, but there were those in the back row who protested that they had not received any money. These people probably had already received their money twice over.

Money gave out on this occasion, and I now come to a dreadful story. The treasure chest with the Mission and with the troops had become exhausted before the treaty was signed. This was due to the fact that the troops had been drawing their back pay. Nobody expected that they would, but there were all these trinkets to be bought at Lhasa and everybody was buying some memento of the sacred

city. Urgent messages were sent down to India for more money, but the money was slow in arriving. I would not be surprised to learn that some high financial official had said: 'What do they want money for in Lhasa?'

Arrangements had been completed. The day for leaving Lhasa had been fixed. The warm clothing had been packed into bundles. There was nothing to stop us. Then the women who had been making the clothes came along demanding their wages. It had happened that the money which had been given to the beggars had been borrowed from the Nepalese Envoy. He was now approached again. He said that he had no money left. Tibetan officials had no money left. What was to be done? I was told that the General had said to the women that he would not leave Lhasa till they, who had worked so hard, had been paid. We were not in telegraphic communication with India, but a line, I think, had been laid as far as the San-po. Thereafter messages had to be brought up by mounted men. Before matters reached a real crisis, a mounted man brought a message to the effect that the treasure chest had been replenished at last. Money would be available when we got back to the San-po. Apparently there was some reason why it could not be brought up to Lhasa.

The women were assembled and told about the



situation, and they were asked to nominate people to receive their wages for them at the San-po. They refused to nominate anybody, saying that there was not a man in Lhasa who could be trusted. Then they added that they would come down with the troops to the San-po and receive their money personally.

'What, all of you?'

'Yes, all of us. We don't trust each other.'

So on the day the troops marched, the women marched with us also, not only the wage-earners but many others who came for the fun of the thing, and also a number of men who had heard from our Tibetan stretcher-men and doolie-bearers of the glories of civilisation. They were coming down to Darjeeling to swell the population of loafers that inhabit the town. So when we started on our return journey what one saw was not a long, orderly column of troops and transport but what looked like the emigration of a nation, for strewn all along the road were parties of Tibetans, men, women and children, with all their household goods on their backs.

Quite a number of us were loath to leave Lhasa. I lingered amongst the last. Many Tibetans were weeping. Whether they missed us or their women and children I do not know, but I think that the bulk of the inhabitants were really sorry to see us go.

But, whether they were sorry to see us go or not, the Tibetans made us no parting gifts. Except one. The General did receive a gift, and a very valuable one. The Abbot of one of the monasteries paid him a visit and presented him with an image of Buddha made of pure gold. The Abbot said, 'This gift is to mark the appreciation of the clergy of Tibet of the fact that no attempt has been made to pillage any monastery in or near Lhasa.'

Let me tell you about all these people who came with us from Lhasa. After two or three days' marching a number of the marchers got tired. We left a certain number behind at every camp. By the time we reached the San-po we were accompanied only by fifty or sixty women who had their wages to get and a group of thirty or forty men seeking a new life in Darjeeling. Some of these men I have mentioned were already embarked on a new career. They had been enlisted by the medical authorities as doolie-bearers. The enlistment, I might say, was made in Lhasa itself. It caused a certain amount of excitement, because recruits were told that before they could join up they had to have a good bath. Such a thing had never been heard of in Lhasa before, that men should be asked to bathe in the river. Everybody turned out to see them do it. The heroes stripped themselves and marched boldly into the water. The experience must have been very

novel to them, because they played about like children, and once they were in the water they did not want to come out. It was a golden sunny day, and many of the inhabitants, seeing these people enjoying themselves, also took off their things and went into the water. It must have been the happiest day Lhasa had known for centuries.

The Tibet adventure should now be considered closed. Yet there is something to be added. The march back to India was regular and monotonous, except for those who, like myself, were keen on shooting. We were able, after reaching camp, to go out round about and see what was to be seen. There was not very much game because, of course, we were on the regular route to Lhasa and most of the big game had been frightened away by the noise and tumult of troops, and I have no doubt that officers, stuck on the lines of communication, took advantage of the fact to do a bit of local exploring and shooting.

The other correspondents went down by double marches. Perceval Landon, indeed, did some terrific riding and got back to India in some phenomenal time. But I was sorry to leave Tibet, and I might have dawdled a bit. One result of this dawdling was that I participated in what one newspaper called 'the picturesque sufferings of the troops.' What exactly happened was that the last part of the column had got down as far as Fort

Phari when the snow we had all been dreading began to fall. I remember how when waking up in the morning I found that my tent was almost buried under snow. Why the tent pole did not give under the strain I do not know. Of course, it was the same with everybody else. The snow had stuck to the canvas and more snow had fallen on top of that. I wonder we were not all suffocated. Anyway, when we had finally got the flaps open by pushing and kicking everything was white round us. And when I say that everything was white, I mean that it was white and of a dazzling brightness. There was no colour of any kind to break the brilliance anywhere.

There was a rearguard behind us, due to arrive some time that day, and possibly it was also thought that once we got out of the plain and began to descend into the Chumbi Valley there would be no more snow. Anyway, the camp was roused, the animals loaded and the march began at the usual hour. What then happened was this. There was a lot of straggling naturally, because it is not easy to march through snow and large numbers of the men had lost the snow-glasses with which they were provided. The result was that the glare began to blister their eyes. I had broken one of the lenses in my snow-glasses and one eye presently became very painful. I tied my handkerchief or something over it and was able to get along.

At one period of the march an officer who had ridden up to me cried suddenly: 'Look! The Retreat from Moscow.' And, indeed, looking back, one saw those struggling and forlorn groups almost exactly as shown in the famous picture. There were animals being pulled along, half dead, there were men with bent heads, stumbling as they walked, and other men leading their companions who, having lost their snow-glasses, were now beginning to lose their sight. Some of these latter were hoisted on mules and ponies. Many of the mules had no loads. I wondered whether their eyes were blistered by this terrible snow, but there were fringes over their eyes designed to keep off flies, and these fringes possibly had the same effect as snow-glasses. Of course Tibetans do not wear snow-glasses, but whenever it snows they tie a fringe made of hair over their eyes.

Luckily when we reached the edge of the plain and began the descent into the valley the glare was not so bad. Heavy snow had fallen in the valley itself, but there were so many rocks and precipices that the expanse of white was broken everywhere. By the time we were half way down most of the snow had gone, but it was nasty, tricky work following the road down, and many people had bad falls.

When we got down to Chumbi I sat down to write a last and final despatch, winding up with a

description of 'the picturesque sufferings of the troops.' I now think the phrase was not actually printed but was used by the foreign editor of a newspaper in a message sent to his correspondent with the force. He enquired why his paper had not had any account of the 'picturesque sufferings' which Reuter's correspondent had sent. The correspondent at that time was already in India; so he did not know of any sufferings. Anyway, to show what snow-blindness could do, that eye of mine which was not protected during the march was not only very painful, but for nearly a week was absolutely blind. I could see nothing out of it. It is no wonder that the troops who had both their eyes in this condition should have thought that they were done for entirely. But the pain ceased after a week or so and the eyes recovered their sight. By the time the party with which I travelled left Chumbi everybody was happy and cheerful.

It is now time that this narrative left Tibet, but I am sorry to do so because there is so much more that might be said. I realise, however, that I must confine myself within a certain limit. People who want to know more about the geography and history and the government of Tibet should get hold of the book written by Perceval Landon, by whose death the world of letters lost a very remarkable man. He did not write for the man in the street, but

what he wrote was good and exact. There are other books about Tibet too, based on the Expedition, and in them will be found narratives more precise than this one. If anybody who reads another book about Tibet finds that the facts narrated do not quite coincide with mine, I rather advise him to accept what I say, because, though I write from memory, the facts are imprinted there very clearly. Besides, I have never lost my interest in Tibet, and the more one reads or talks about Tibet the more frequently do incidents of the amazing Expedition to Lhasa crop up. One's memory is thus continually refreshed.

I said when writing about events in China that those who take part in a campaign should try and discover whether anything was to be learned, from the point of view of a soldier, from the conduct of the fighting. In China I was impressed by the value of missile weapons as compared with others. In Tibet I was impressed in the same way. Even the Tibetans had some idea about the value of missiles, for they did not rely solely on their swords and spears. Apart from the few odd and obsolete cannon they had, many were armed with prong-guns; there were a certain number of rifles and one should not omit to mention the slingers. One might even call the booby-traps, that were laid for the mounted infantry on the top of slopes overlooking

a road in the valley, missiles. The boulders in the traps were discharged from some distance away, and the people who loosed the traps were never seen. I do not know of any instance in which our troops were actually struck by boulders leaping down the hill, but it certainly made our scouts very wary.

Another thing one learned in Tibet was what a tremendous part transport plays when troops are on the move. The success of the Expedition was a triumph for the Supply and Transport Department in India.



## FIGHTING THE MOHMANDS

I forgot my dreams about France when, in July, 1916, I think, the company was ordered to take over two Frontier forts. Captain Ralph, the company commander, was to go to Fort Abazai with half the company and I was to go to Shabkadr with the other half. This was my first independent command, and naturally I was very pleased about it.\* It was to be a rather lonely life because there were to be no other officers at Shabkadr. But that did not dismay me, because I knew that there would be much to do and much to learn. I saw a picture of Shabkadr the other day, but it was not the fort I had charge of. Military engineers had knocked it about and rebuilt it.

When I got to Shabkadr I found that in addition to my own people I was in charge of thirty or forty sowars from a cavalry regiment at Nowshera. There was also a detachment of Mohmand Militia. These people were really armed police. I was told that they were only very indirectly under my command, and I did not like them very much.

The officer whom I relieved said the fort was

sniped at nearly every night, but if care were taken that the men kept under cover there was no reason why anybody should be hit. So that was one of the first orders I gave. No one to show himself on the skyline after dark. The first night the sniping was much heavier than on any subsequent night. The local Mohmands, of course, knew that a new garrison had come in and thought they would give it a fright. But I think none of the Rajputs were disturbed.

I felt the responsibility that first night and it was while making a round of the sentries that I thought of reviving an old custom in the army, that of making the sentry posts call out once every hour that all was well. You know what I mean. 'Number one, all's well,' 'Number two, all's well,' and so on. This cry was to be carried from sentry to sentry from dark to daylight and when each hour struck. On later nights it was rather comforting to me to hear that cry going round the fort when I was awake. Later on I was to be told by a general that I had no authority for issuing an order like that. 'And you are giving away the position of your sentries.' To this I replied that I had thought of that, and the sentries were never to call consecutively from the same spot.

One day I was told that the Political Officer for the Mohmands was coming to the fort to meet some

kind of a deputation of Mohmands. I was surprised and pleased to find when he did come that he was no other than that Griffith who had travelled with me up to Peshawar to join the Zakha Khel Expedition. He had stayed in Peshawar and had been given a place in the Political Department which enabled him to study the Frontier people and their languages. Now he was an expert. He informed me that the Mohmands were still very disturbed and he would not be surprised if very shortly the mobile column were not again ordered out of Peshawar to fight another 'battle' just in that very spot where we had fought one in April.

Griffith was quite right as it turned out. Various reports and rumours reached the fort of gatherings on the other side of the first range of hills, and we heard about German money being lavishly distributed. To show you how silly and ignorant these Mohmands are, I must tell you that on one occasion crowds of them came into the village below the fort wanting to change British rupees for an inferior and cheaper coin known as the Kabul rupee. They had been told that the British or Indian rupee would no longer be accepted in any part of the world. Some other people had also heard this report, and they arrived at Shabkadr quite prepared to change Kabuli rupees for Indian rupees. But their Kabuli rupees were made of lead. They

did a roaring trade. I reported this matter to some civil authority, but the reply I got was that it would not hurt the Mohmands to have a lesson in economics and the laws of currency.

The mobile column came out twice while I was in Shabkadr, but to show the trick that memory plays, I am inclined to confuse the incidents of one with those of the other. However, I will do my best to set down events in the order in which I think they occurred.

The Mohmand incursion in July was not a very serious one. We had heard several weeks before that there was unrest among these wild people and that attempts were being made to collect a lashkar which would come down and perhaps be able to repeat the triumph of April. The Mohmands called it a triumph, because they were able to get away with a certain number of rifles with very small loss to themselves.

I must here say that it is rather difficult to believe the estimates given out at Simla of the losses inflicted on the enemy in both battles. I do not know how Simla gets its estimates. What is the use of asking the troops who have taken part in an engagement how many of the enemy they have killed? Every officer and man would say something different. Whenever a single man of the enemy is seen to drop he is immediately put down as dead.

Whereas, all he has done is to lie down to escape observation. If the numbers of the enemy killed on the Frontier were as big as stated in our official estimates the troops would certainly see the dead and wounded being carried off. As it is they seldom see anybody being carried off, and they never seem to find any dead when they have captured a position. The official reports say that the dead and wounded were carried off, but how were they carried off without being noticed? When we attempt to remove a wounded or a dead man the group engaged in doing so presents a big target and is likely to lose more men. I do not know how many of the enemy were killed at the affair on Rajput Ridge, but I do know that the Mohmands claimed the battle as a victory for themselves. Certainly they were prepared to fight again very soon afterwards.

On the second occasion the mobile column came out and camped in the vicinity of the fort as before. The engagement that followed resembled in several respects the previous one: that is to say, the Mohmands showed themselves on the hills, came down a certain distance into the low hills, and were attacked by a single regiment, with another in support and a third in reserve. The enemy retired as before, and when the time came for our troops to return to camp they followed us.

But there were two differences on this occasion. There was no crowd of spectators. I believe that the Chief Commissioner, who was none other than that famous man Roos Keppel, was very angry with the behaviour of the Peshawar people on that occasion, and he gave orders that no one was to come out to see a battle again. If they did they must not be surprised if they were mistaken for the enemy. Nobody came.

The second difference was that the Mohmands were not followed up as far as they had been when my regiment made the attack. I think we went too far, but on the second occasion what was done was perfectly right. The retirement was carried out, as far as one could learn, in very perfect order, but the enemy seemed to have come down into the hills a good deal farther than they had on the previous occasion, for thus is what happened

From the parapets of the fort one could see something of the battle. It was not very much, but we could follow the successive positions taken up by the enemy by watching the bursting of the shells. I think I had gone back to my quarters in the fort to have some food when a staff officer dashed in and asked me how many men I had. I told him I had a hundred, and thirty or forty sowars. He said, 'Never mind the sowars, but get your sepoy's under arms at once.'

I said, "They are under arms," because I had told them that they were in the position of an inlying picket and must be ready to rush out at a moment's notice.

Then the staff officer said, 'Collect as many men as you can who have been left behind outside the fort as cooks and for other reasons, and fall them in together with your men outside the fort.'

I did this, though it meant a lot of running to and fro, within a quarter of an hour. It was amusing to see how the cooks and other men belonging to the British regiment dropped whatever occupation they were engaged upon in order to fall in and participate in the fight. I told them that there was no time to bother about dress. What they wanted were their rifles and ammunition belts.

We had barely fallen in when the same staff officer directed me to double the men out in a certain direction, extend, and take up a position to cover the retirement of the mobile column, which was now returning to camp. We dashed out in a fine way, I thought, and I was quite pleased to be taking a leading part in what might prove to be a memorable incident. My orders were not very complete, but I did what I could, having given due thought to the lie of the country and the direction of the road from Sobhan Khwar.

The firing seemed to grow closer and closer and

everybody was on the *qui vive*. Then suddenly firing ceased and nothing happened for some time, perhaps an hour. Then I got a message to return to the fort because there was no longer any fear of the enemy following up, so that was that. But how bitter was the disappointment among the cooks and others.

On the third day, I think, the mobile column left and things went on much as before. I say, much as before, because there was now an undercurrent of unrest among the local people. One could feel it in the demeanour of the people in the villages that one passed through when going out with the men on patrol.

Nestling close under the walls of the fort is a village called, I think, Shankargarh. A good many Hindus live in this village, mostly people of the trading classes and a few shopkeepers. These men, in my days, had a fund which was used to pay five or six watchmen. They were Gurkhas, and it was their business to keep a look-out at night. I was rather interested in them because they belonged to a type of Gurkha that any regiment would have been glad to enlist. I asked them once why they had not enlisted in a Gurkha' regiment, and the reply was that they had no relatives or friends in any regiment and they would not like to go and enlist in quarters where they were unknown: but their village in



Nepal had always sent men to Shankargarh, and that is why they were there. At the time about which I am talking certain of the younger banias and traders had formed themselves into a squad of volunteers, having obtained arms on loan from some civil authority. This squad of volunteers also interested me greatly, because the members belonged to a class which was considered very unmilitary indeed. The idea of arming them would have been derided by any army officer.

Away in Shabkadr, of course, one heard no news of what was going on in the district. But I was able to sense that some agitation of a very ugly kind was on foot. After all, the people round me were themselves Mohmands, and an artificial line, drawn across the country, separating British subjects from those who were not British subjects, could not alter the fact of kinship. What was thought and felt on the other side of the Border was also thought and felt inside it. There was no means of preventing tribal Mohmands from going to and fro among their kinsfolk on our side and stirring them up. I redoubled my efforts to keep the garrison in an alert and effective condition.

The cavalry had to do big patrols every day, and in addition to the night sentries I put on more day sentries. I had seen in a diary, which was kept in the fort, a suggestion by some officer who had been

commanding there once that day sentries outside the fort should not carry rifles. His idea was that any apparently harmless group of Mohmands passing into Shankargarh could easily rush a sentry and deprive him of his rifle. I think some such incident had already taken place. I thought the suggestion quite a good one, and though there was some demur from the Indian officers, they realised that there was sense in this suggestion. In fact, even when we went down to parade in a certain field below the fort unarmed sentries were put well out on the flanks.

Then one day I heard from an old Sikh, who had come into the fort from Peshawar on some business or other, that everybody was saying that there was going to be another big battle at Shabkadr, and it would be seen this time who were really masters of the fort. He did not say so, but he certainly seemed to imply that there was unrest in the Peshawar district, or in other words, if the Mohmands came down from the hills they might expect support from their kinsmen in the plains.

The next thing took the form of a letter from the headquarters of the Peshawar Division, in which I was told that the whole division was coming up and that I was to make certain arrangements for the messing of the divisional staff who would make the fort their headquarters. I must say about this messing

business that when a brigade came up and pitched its camp just below the fort, the brigadier said that it would save him a lot of trouble if he messed with me. I naturally said that I would be delighted, and I was delighted because he was a very charming man. But I had overlooked the fact that the headquarters of the division were also going to mess in the fort and that I was to mess with them. When the headquarters staff arrived and it was discovered that I already had the brigadier in my mess, which was to become theirs, I got a tremendous dressing down from G S O.I, (or was it 2?), and the brigadier was asked to go back to his brigade. But this is by the way.

One day I discovered that news had reached Peshawar that a very big Mohmand lashkar was collecting behind the hills. And this fact, combined with the other of local disaffection, had induced the military authorities to send out a really effective force. The Mohmands, and the silly Peshawar people, really believed that the British garrison in India had been reduced to almost nothing as a result of the war. The Peshawar Command decided to take steps to show the Mohmands that this story was not true. So not only was the division sent up to Shabkadr but an extra cavalry brigade, and, in addition to the mountain batteries, two brigades, I think, of field guns. Such a force

## **FIGHTING THE MOHMANDS**

had never been heard of as taking part in Mohmand quarrels before. So our troops came, horse, foot and artillery, and the fort became a very lively place. All that was needed was for the Mohmands to come down from the hills and start a fight. There were pessimistic people at divisional headquarters who thought that a mistake had been made in bringing up so many troops. The Mohmands, they said, would never come down to face such a gathering.

You may remember that I said my company commander, Captain Ralph, was holding Fort Abazai with the other half of the company. One morning he rode in and said that the troops from Nowshera were also coming in by way of Abazai, and were taking up a position to cover the right flank. This seemed to me to prove that information had really been received that the Mohmands were on the march. And in due course our troops all came, as I have said, horse, foot and guns, and armoured cars, too; and even more than I thought, for there was to be a whole cavalry brigade camped behind somewhere.

Then, one morning, I could see, through glasses, distant specks on the hills. The Mohmands were really coming down. They hesitated for a day, or seemed to hesitate, for it was not until next morning that the action began. I arranged myself in a long chair on a certain parapet of the fort and prepared to

## A "ROVING" COMMISSION

have a good view of the battle, though, on this occasion, the view was more restricted than before, because, in the interval, great crops of sugar cane had grown up between the fort and the foothills. Still, there were the shells to watch and, remembering what happened last time, I thought the little garrison in the fort might also have a look in. So I sat down to watch with pleasant anticipations. The shelling went on for a considerable time and many of the shells were larger than on the previous occasion, for several batteries of field guns had been brought up also. Everything that could be done to impress the Mohmands with the fact that we had plenty of troops was done.

But I got tired of looking on at the bursting of shells, so I went back to my quarters and sat on a sort of verandah overlooking the courtyard. From the centre of the courtyard rose a very high mast at the top of which was placed a 'crow's-nest' which was used for signalling purposes. I could see a helio flashing from there. Around the bottom of the mast were grouped the Divisional General and his staff. It was a good place for them to be in because they could get every message sent back from the troops engaged almost at once. Sometimes, too, I heard what the message was, or comments upon it. But I did not hear enough to enable me to get any kind of connected picture of what was taking place. But

## **FIGHTING THE MOHMANDS**

**It was evident that some pretty severe fighting was going on.**

From where I was I could see a portion of the field of battle, or at least a portion of the hills which were being shelled. Turning my glasses to the spot I could watch the shells falling upon a great cairn or mound of stones surmounted by a small flag. This cairn had been put up by the Mohmands shortly after the Mutiny to commemorate that gallant soldier, Nicholson, who was a very great man on the Frontier. I was not surprised to discover later on that a battery had mistaken the flag on the top of the cairn for some kind of Mohmand standard and had been busily engaged in trying to destroy it and the Mohmands who were supposed to be clustering behind. There were no Mohmands behind, but the cairn was somewhat damaged.

The battle seemed to go on for hours and hours, neither side apparently making any progress. It was clear that we were determined not to be drawn too far into the hills, and the Mohmands were equally determined not to press home any attack till we had begun to retire for the night.

It must have been about four o'clock when I gathered that the General had directed that the retirement should begin. Apparently the Guides were the battalion that had been pushed up closest to the Mohmands, and they would have to be very

## A ROVING COMMISSION

cautious when they retired, for the Mohmands were still full of fight and remembered the rifles they had obtained during the engagement in April. Later on I was told by an officer who was with the battalion in support that the Guides did the retirement in what he styled a 'beautiful' way, that is to say they were able to get away without having to abandon any of their dead or wounded. Still, they had a good few casualties, the numbers of which were afterwards greatly exaggerated in Peshawar city. But the divisional staff did not know of these casualties till some time afterwards.

After the Guides had withdrawn, the troops in support came into action, because the Mohmands, though they did not press on, took up a second position and were apparently hoping to get something out of a dash forward when our next line withdrew. This withdrawal was finally effected, though very slowly. In due course the British troops seemed to have got back to their various camps.

But shelling still continued, and there were times when the musketry fire seemed rather close. The General and his staff did not leave their position under the crow's-nest. Then a message came which was earnestly debated. I had given up all hope of being more than a distant spectator of affairs when a staff officer came up to me. He had spotted me sitting up in my verandah. He said: 'You have

## FIGHTING THE MOHMANDS

some cavalry here with you, haven't you?' I replied, saying that I had thirty or forty men.

He said: 'Then it's boot and saddle for you, my lad. You have to take these thirty men with you to Sobhan Khwar and escort the wounded there back to Shabkadr.'

Though I had my Rajputs under arms all the day, I never thought the cavalry would be required. So it took a little time to get the escort ready, as the men were dispersed all over the fort occupying what they thought to be vantage points. However, I did have them ready before the General enquired what I was hesitating about. Off we went.

Sobhan Khwar, where a brigade had its camp, is about five or six miles from Shabkadr. We trotted gaily along, I being mounted on a horse borrowed from the cavalry. On the way we met a great procession of horsemen; the cavalry brigade returning to its camp. At its head rode General Crocker, a famous thruster. I noticed that the horses and the men of the British cavalry seemed to be particularly tired. Many men were bandaged; there were many helmets missing; and in many cases two men were riding one horse. I was to learn later what had happened. But I might as well say now what I did hear. It was rather strange that I should not have heard in the fort about a dramatic incident that had taken place quite early in the morning.



## **A ROVING COMMISSION**

It appears that the cavalry brigade had been sent at dawn to take up a position guarding the left flank of our attack. The British cavalry regiment was leading, and when it had reached its appointed position it came under fire. The Mohmands had got there first, and were firing from the crops surrounding a village. When it was discovered from the extent of the fire where the Mohmands were, General Crocker did not hesitate for a moment. He ordered the horsemen to charge the position. The regiment deployed very rapidly and proceeded to charge. What the General did not know, nor any of the cavalrymen, was that between them and the enemy flowed a canal, twenty feet wide. The colonel was leading, and he was mounted on a magnificent charger. The animal took the canal in one bound. A few other horses were also able to do the leap, but the majority balked at the water and stopped. The colonel was cut to pieces, and so were all the others who had crossed the canal. One man, a sergeant-major, I think, received twenty or thirty sword-cuts but survived. The regiment, after losing a good many men and horses on the banks of the canal, withdrew in good order into cover. Now, this regiment had taken part in a similar charge at Omdurman, and by a curious coincidence the very morning on which the second gallant, but useless, charge was made

## FIGHTING THE MOHMANDS

was the anniversary of Omdurman, which was always kept up by the regiment. The Mohmand did not attempt to cross the canal, nor did they attempt to move up on the flank. I think our artillery found them and soon drove them away. Perhaps they joined their brethren who were holding positions higher up the hill.

But let me get back to the wounded I was supposed to escort. I rode into the brigade camp with my following and was met by that very General Dunsterville whom Kipling has commemorated as 'Stalky.' He said: 'Who are these like stars appearing, or, in other words, what do you want?' I told him that I had been sent with an escort for the wounded who were to be taken to Shabkadr. To this he replied that the Mohmands had come very low down and they might attack the convoy before it reached Shabkadr. I said that was why an escort had been sent. But the General refused to allow any wounded to be taken out of the camp.

So I had to return without them. I could see figures moving about five or six hundred yards off the road, and I did not know whether I was right or wrong in keeping my men in close formation as we trotted along. These figures were, I suppose, local villagers who, having been in hiding during the battle, had now come out again. Anyway we arrived safely at the fort, and I reported that General

## A ROVING COMMISSION

Dunsterville would not allow the wounded to be sent out of his camp.

That night was one of some tension, because the Mohmands had not retired right away into the hills. Ralph and his little lot, who should have gone back to Abazai after the battle, were told they could hardly get back before dark and they had better come into the fort and spend the night there. Next morning it was found that the Mohmands had gone. I do not know what information the military had, but the troops were not taken back to Peshawar and Nowshera for some days. I think that the design was to continue to impress the local inhabitants with the fact that we had lots of troops.

During the time the troops remained no Mohmands from across the border visited Shabkadr. But later on when the troops had gone they began to come again to Shankargarh for trading purposes, and from some of them I gathered that they had suffered more than usual in the last battle. One man said: 'We often have two or three killed, but this time we had fourteen, and most of them were slain by shell-fire.' Then he said: 'Why do you fight us with cannon? It is not fair.' Another man also admitted to fourteen killed, but he added that five had been killed by a trick that we had played. One regiment had left behind a box of ammunition, apparently discarded in a hasty retirement. A

## FIGHTING THE MOHMANDS

group of Mohmands had fallen upon it, but, in trying to open it, the box exploded and killed them all. The man was angry about this, because he said that the box was not full of ammunition but of something else which was designed to explode when the box was being opened. Still later on I was told that this Mohmand story was quite true; the Sappers or somebody had constructed some kind of a land-mine which went off if it were shaken or thrown about in any violent way.

When the troops finally left the fort an Indian battalion was left behind to strengthen the garrison, and the officer in command took over the command of the fort, and I ceased for the time being to be of any importance. I was rather sorry about this one night when a very important message came through in the Playfair code. It contained some alarming information about Afghan troops having crossed the Frontier in thousands. But I was not let into the secret till some time afterwards. So I did not understand the extra precautions that were then taken for the protection of the fort.

It turned out later on that the information contained in the message was false. No Afghans had crossed any frontier. The whole story was a bazaar rumour which had certainly reached the civil authorities, but which the civil authorities did not believe worth while passing on to the military, who

## A ROVING COMMISSION

later picked it up on their own. But the report was believed by many people in Peshawar and is an indication of the kind of rumour that sometimes spreads in that city. As I have said before, there are many people on our side of the Border who have kinship with tribesmen on the other side. The more ignorant of these are perhaps only too ready to take a side against the Government, though I would make a difference between these and the others who are merely agitators, and who would not for a moment care to have the country under the rule of people from across the Frontier. The agitators demonstrate, but they do not help the trans-Frontier people either actively or passively: In fact, they suffer from the raiders themselves.

During the time I was at Shabkadr, only six months, there were in addition to the big incursions which resulted in real fighting, about eight or nine raids, made at night by small bodies of men out to loot and rob, and perhaps kidnap. I am only speaking of raids round and about Shabkadr. On three of these occasions the raid took place so close to the fort that I was able to go out with a small part of the garrison, in the hope of intercepting the raiders before they got back to the hills. I cannot say I ever did intercept them. Of course, they knew that we were coming. People in the vicinity of the fort and friendly to the raiders probably kept

an eye on the gate, and as soon as the gate was opened off went a boy like the wind in the direction of the shooting and the shouting. The shooting and the shouting was always pronounced, but it did not last very long because the raiders had to be off before they were caught. As I say, they were never caught. But it was exciting to steal out at night, rifles at the trail, in single file, with the hope that we might yet catch some notorious outlaw.

Then one day there came a summons to return to Peshawar because the Rajputs at Abazai and Shabkadr were to go to France, and Ralph and I were to go with them.

## THE THIRD AFGHAN WAR

I was not fated to go to France. That malign influence which had nearly wrecked the career of the Duke of Wellington was also at work in the case of General Willcocks, who was commanding the Indian Corps in France; though, with regard to the latter 'Sepoy General,' I suppose one should say, not 'influence' but 'want of influence' was primarily responsible for the recall of the Indian troops from France and for the end of a military career which promised greatness. Whatever it was, the company of Rajputs that was going to France did not go. Instead most of it was deflected to Mesopotamia, and I was sent in charge. But the story of that terrible campaign and all its plagues does not lie within the scope of this book. When it was all over, and the war was over and I was demobilised, I had had my fill of fighting and adventure.

And yet somehow I did not have my fill. When the Third Afghan War began, I, who had gone back to my newspaper work, was wild to go and see what an Afghan warrior was like in action. There

### **THE THIRD AFGHAN WAR**

are some people who were alive at the time, and had reached an adult age and who knew all about war, who have never heard of that Third Afghan War. I was never more astonished in my life than when a friend who had served many years in India denied that there had been any Third Afghan War. When I said, 'Yes, indeed there was. I saw a good deal of it,' his reply was, 'Oh, some border raid. I don't call that a war.'

Later on I found that this friend had been in England on leave when the Afghan War started. He is a keen student of affairs and always keeps himself in touch with what is going on, and yet he had never seen in any English paper a reference to the war, nor apparently did anybody speak of it when he returned to India. So he was quite convinced that to talk of a war in connection with the Afghans was a gross exaggeration. Anxious to convince him that I was right, I looked up for his benefit one of those annual publications which are supposed to cover everything of importance that has happened during the year before. Under 'Afghanistan' we not only found my war mentioned, but a grossly exaggerated summary of it. It was stated that the Afghans had advanced into India in 1919, burning and looting, and were turned out with the greatest difficulty.

The short facts about the origin of the war are



## **A ROVING COMMISSION**

these: the young Amir, Amanullah, headstrong and not to be controlled, had come to believe the Russian propaganda stories that were then flying about the whole of Central Asia. The stories were to the effect that British rule in India had doubled and trebled in severity; that the people of India had been reduced to a condition of slavery and their lives were no longer tolerable to them. Central Asia was also flooded with a horrible print showing a couple of Indians attached to a plough which they were dragging over a field beneath lashes from a couple of European soldiers. This print certainly had influence in exciting animosity against us among the Pathans and Afghans. The Soviet circulated it in India also, but it did not do any harm there because the soldiers in the picture were not in any kind of uniform with which Indians associated British soldiers. They looked like Germans. So far from doing any harm the picture did good in India from the British point of view.

But the Soviet employed other means of stirring up trouble in India. Only a few months prior to the start of the Afghan War there had been serious anti-British riots and movements in the Punjab. News of all this reached Afghanistan and the Amir thought the time was propitious for a descent upon India.

The Government of India was fairly well

### THE THIRD AFGHAN WAR

informed of the dangerous state of affairs that was developing in Afghanistan. But it was not thought that the Amir would do what he did without giving us ample warning. What he did was to suddenly direct the British representatives in Kabul to leave the country, and he followed up this move with an attack on the Khyber Pass itself. His troops brushed away the opposition offered by our Afridi levies and took up a position at Landi Kotal on the top of the Pass. They halted there for a while and so gave the military authorities time to rush up reinforcements to Peshawar.

The news of this affair was kept quiet for a while, but of course the famous Pass could not be closed by Afghans without the story running through India in exaggerated forms. The papers had to be told, and when they were told, as I have said, I was wild to go and see what was happening. There may have been protests at the idea of sending any war correspondents up to the front, but I had behind me the influence of Sir Edward Buck, Reuter's representative at Simla. He managed to break through or placate all opposition, and very soon I was informed that I should go up to Simla to get my papers and credentials, and to be interviewed.

At that time, though I had been demobilised, I was still an officer in the Indian Army Reserve, and I thought that it might help me to keep my rank and

## A ROVING COMMISSION

wear my uniform, and it was as Captain Newman that I was interviewed at Simla, and my papers were made out as for Captain Newman. I mention this fact because later on I was to have some argument with the Press censor about whether I had a right to go about as an officer.

Now for a moment I want to go back to what I said before about people not being aware to-day that there was a Third Afghan War. What is most surprising about this ignorance, particularly in India, is that for this war there was mobilised a very much larger army than had been mobilised for either of the two previous Afghan wars, which occupy so prominent a place in the history of India.

Just before I got up to Peshawar and assumed with a great deal of elation the duty of recording events for the benefit of the public, some surprising things had happened in Peshawar, the details of which had not been given out by the authorities. Before Afghan troops had seized the head of the Pass many thousands of copies of a proclamation by the Amir had been brought into Peshawar and circulated in the city. The Amir called upon everybody to assist him in turning the British out of the country. The copies of this proclamation were brought to Peshawar by the Afghan postmaster of that city and distributed by him. This postmaster was something more than a postmaster. He was also the Amir's

### THE THIRD AFGHAN WAR

agent in many commercial and similar matters. Of course, the police and other civil authorities soon heard of what the postmaster was doing and arrangements were made for his arrest.

Before the arrangements could be completed for his arrest the whole city was in a turmoil and it was thought that all the police and representatives of authority in the city would be massacred. A daring Mussulman official said he would go into the city and reason with the mob. He went in – and was stabbed to death. But somehow no general rising took place, and in due course the civil and military authorities between them were able to reinforce all the police posts in the city and make whatever arrests they liked.

Peshawar being quiet and reinforcements having been brought up from the troops then stationed in echelon, between Peshawar and Ambala, steps were taken to turn the Afghans out of the Pass. I am sorry I did not see the battle that followed. No details of it, as far as I know, have ever been published, but I was able to learn something of what happened from people who had been there. It appears that the Afghans held the Kotal in great strength and on a considerable front. You must know that the Pass at the top broadens out, and the Afghans not only held the plain but the ridges on each side. But the Amir's army was not composed

of men with the same instinct and understanding of warfare as the Frontier Pathans. They allowed themselves to be outflanked and outmanœuvred and although they kept up a persistent fire for some time, they retired down the other side of the hill when our attack, which was pressed home in two directions, developed. The Afghan guns, I was told, were manned by some very resolute gunners, who refused to leave their guns. Large numbers of them were shot down and all the Afghan guns captured.

After retreating from the Kotal, the Afghans attempted a second stand at the bottom of the Pass, at Landi Khana, which marks the actual frontier between India and Afghanistan. The resistance here was not very stout and the Afghans retired to Dakha. Here there seems to have been a third fight, but our troops were not very much troubled, and the Afghans made a third retirement in the direction of Jelalabad. It was to turn out that the Afghan regulars did not even stay at Jelalabad; they demobilised themselves, and for a little time the whole country was at the mercy of the British troops, had they been ordered to advance. But there was no advance, because, firstly, it was not known that the Afghan army had disappeared, and secondly, there was no desire on the part of the British Government to embark on any campaign of

conquest. Later on, the way was not so open because the Amir was able to bribe the Mohmands and Shinwaris to take the place of the soldiers and hold the Kurd Khyber, which is a smaller pass, against us. It was quite a time before it was realised that these Mohmands and Shinwaris were the only people between us and Jelalabad.

That was the position of affairs when I reached Peshawar. There was with me an officer who had joined me at Rawalpindi. Both of us had come up by mail train, and thought we were going straight on to Peshawar, but we were told at Pindi we would have to wait for nobody knew how long while troop trains were rushing by. It happened that one troop train was carrying a regiment that had been in camp with my regiment before I was demobilised. Colonel Stockwell, spotting me on the platform, kindly offered to take me and the other officer up to Peshawar. We got in rather late at night and were told that the Army Headquarters were established at Nedou's Hotel. We might find accommodation there ourselves, but it was very doubtful. However, both of us went on to the hotel. People had not yet gone to bed. There were lots of lights about, and I was able to see General Barrett himself. He professed to be delighted to see me and introduced me to the camp commandant and to Colonel Bell, the Press censor. The former, or

perhaps it was some other officer, invited me to become a member of the Headquarters Mess, but he added he was sorry that there was no room in the hotel for me and I had to find some other place to live in. But it was of no use my going to the Dak bungalow because that was already full. In other words there was no place for me to go to at all that night. It struck me that the next morning I could buy a tent and pitch that somewhere.

In the meanwhile there was myself and the officer who had come up with me, both without any shelter for the night. Then I had the idea that I might call on the manager of the branch of the Alliance Bank of Simla which was not far off. I knew that Sir Edward Buck, whom I have mentioned before, was a Director of the Bank and perhaps that fact might help me. The other officer came with me and we called on the manager, who lived on the premises. Luckily, he was awake, and when I explained my mission and made my appeal he said he would be delighted. And I think he was. He was a most charming man and said we could live there for ever. He added he was disappointed that we could not mess with him, but I explained that it was important for me to keep in touch with the Headquarters Staff as much as possible. So both of us were entertained that night and slept comfortably.

Next morning, not too early, I went down to

breakfast at the hotel and thereafter searched out and found Colonel Bell and his quarters. I had met the Press censor before in Tibet when he was with the 32nd Pioneers. Now, I think, he was Judge-Advocate-General. He explained to me the conditions under which I was to be permitted to act as a correspondent, and as I listened my heart sank, for I was to be left with hardly any discretion at all. I was not to leave Peshawar and go up to the front without permission and everything I sent was to be censored doubly, that is to say there was to be a civil as well as a military censorship. Also I was not to retain my army rank. I protested against not being allowed to see the fighting and enquired how I could report it without seeing it. To this Bell replied: 'We will tell you what has happened.' Then he added that perhaps I might get permission sometimes to go to the front at a quiet time, but I must always go under charge of somebody. I know in the course of the discussion that followed, Colonel Bell said that they were short of transport and even if they wanted to let me travel up and down the line they could not let me have any kind of motor-car. When I said I would buy one myself he replied, advising me strongly not to do so because if I did the military authorities would seize it.

Very downcast was I when I got into a tonga and drove to Government House to call on the Chief



Commissioner and see his private secretary. I wrote my name in the Chief Commissioner's book and saw the private secretary, who was later destined to be Chief Commissioner himself, Mr. Maffey. He said he would give me all the information in his power and he hoped that it would not be necessary for him to alter anything I wrote. Back I went to my room at the bank to think over things. I believed that under the conditions that were imposed upon me I would not be able to do work of any value at all, and my first idea was to telegraph to Buck and ask him to see what he could do to modify the rules, particularly those relating to my not being allowed to go to the front and not keeping my rank in the army. But it is curious how often, if you ponder over things, you can find a way out. I finally thought of something which might enable me to still do valuable work in spite of all the Press censors.

My idea was this. I would make use of my knowledge of the language and of the people to discover things for myself, not relating so much to the movements of our troops as to what was happening on the other side, in Afghanistan and in the Khyber. I knew very well that in the Peshawar bazaars everything was known that was worth knowing. Information was coming and going all the time across the Frontier, because there is no

absolute barrier between the two countries. There are other ways into India besides through the passes and I also knew that in those frontier hills men travelled across country thirty, and even fifty, miles a day.

The more I thought over this idea the more attractive it seemed; I then realised for the first time why men (journalists) take such a pleasure in being entrusted with the position of special correspondent with such and such a government, or in a big foreign city. They are really seeking things out, important things, and when they have got them printed they feel a triumph as if they had shot a tiger or brought down a brace of snipe, right and left.

Full of my idea I asked my servant to enquire whether there was a munshi anywhere in the locality who would be prepared to teach me Pushtu. He came back from the kitchen in a few minutes to say that a man who taught officers was living a short distance away. I told my servant to take a tonga and fetch him at once, and in less than half an hour the servant returned with the man. It took me some time to explain to him that although I did not want him to teach me anything I would still pay him the wages of a munshi if he was able to introduce to me somebody in the Peshawar bazaar who could be trusted to repeat to me, without any exaggeration, the stories he heard in the bazaar. 'In fact,' I said to

the munshi, 'you need not introduce the man to me at all. He can tell you the stories and you can repeat them to me. And, instead of getting the stories from one man, you can get them from as many as you like.'

The munshi finally grasped something of what was behind my request. 'Oh,' he said, 'this is secret work.' His eyes sparkled: then they became downcast again. 'No,' he said, 'it is dangerous. Everybody knows that I teach officers Pushtu, and if it came to be known that I was giving them news I might get into trouble.'

But the man wanted money, I could see that, because with this Afghan war coming on he had lost all his pupils. Presently he said, 'Give me so much' (it was not very much, thirty or fifty rupees), 'and I will bring a man to you who will do what you want.'

That afternoon a man was brought. A nondescript person who looked like a servant, a second-rate cook, but a very short interview convinced me that this man was an absolute find. I paid the munshi his money and the man remained as my servant. He was a Gupdar. That will not mean much perhaps to the average European resident in India, because the Gupdars are not employed except by a few Indian bankers and merchants. Their numbers are dwindling rapidly because of modern

conditions. These Gupdars follow the same profession as did those 'intelligence men,' who, in the Middle Ages and much later, perhaps even to the end of the eighteenth century and later, were in the service of bankers and merchants and collected information for them about great events that were pending or had taken place. How did financiers, like Rothschild and others, get their advance information which enabled them to make great fortunes? Gupdars are the 'intelligence men' of India.

Later on I gathered that the Gupdar who became my servant for the time being was under some kind of obligation to the munshi and hence his willingness to serve me. As a rule these people will not act for the Government or for Europeans because they say they do not understand Western ways and methods.

The troops at Dakha sent out strong parties every day to reconnoitre the Kurd Khyber which the enemy was holding. Whenever the parties retired each day they were followed up, and generally lost a few men. On this occasion the reconnoitring party was stronger than usual in numbers, the idea being to probe further into the enemy's position. The probing was carried out quite well, and it was learned the tribesmen were there in great force, but no Afghan soldiers were to be seen. When the retirement to camp began the tribesmen followed

very fast and were kept off with some difficulty. Messages were flashed back by heliograph to the camp asking for reinforcements. These were sent out. Presently the watchers from the camp saw that our retiring troops were out of the Pass and were now in the more open country into which Mohmands had not followed them before. This time they did.

It struck somebody in the camp that by thus coming into level ground the Mohmands had laid themselves open to a cavalry charge. There was a British cavalry regiment handy – Dragoons, no less. They hastily booted and saddled and were shown the objective. What then happened? The story I heard from an officer who was describing what he had personally seen was that the Dragoons passed through our troops and advanced upon the Mohmands. The enemy, however, did not turn and flee, instead, they broke into little groups and knelt down and fired at the advancing horsemen at long range. When the Dragoons changed from the walk into the trot, and then into the gallop and so to the charge, the Mohmand fire did not slacken. Men and horses fell. Our line was considerably broken by these casualties. Although the country was fairly level it was not so level that a line could be maintained. The charging men and horses themselves broke into groups, some of which

succeeded in passing through and getting behind the Mohmands: they then wheeled about and came back. My informant said he did not think any Mohmands were actually sabred. They were wearing heavy clothing and it is not easy for any cavalryman to sabre a foot soldier who refuses to run away and who continues to shoot.

Anyway this diversion enabled the retirement to be carried out. And if the Mohmands had had any desire to come on still further and attack the camp they soon abandoned it, because our field artillery opened upon them. You may fight cavalry in the open with rifles, but you cannot fight shells.

This story was passed by both censors, though, mind you, neither of them had thought of telling me about the incident, which was my fault from the cavalry point of view. Everybody wants to know what happens in a charge.

Now I have mentioned three cavalry charges in these reminiscences. One was at Hosiwu in China, the other near Shabkadr and this third one at Dakha. On all three occasions the charge came to nothing. That I think shows that the occasions on which cavalry can charge successfully are very rare. But I never saw the story of the charge at Dakha printed in the Press in England. Who stopped it?

There was no more fighting in the Kurd Khyber after this affair. Perhaps the Mohmands suffered

severely from our shell fire, but I rather think that we did not venture so far into the Kurd Pass again. Perhaps the tribesmen did not follow up again in such large numbers or so persistently. There was a kind of uneasy peace there, though the nightly sniping did not cease.

One of the facts that I learned from the Gupdar was that there were practically no Afghan soldiers in the Kurd Khyber. The Amir and his advisers had thought of another policy: they set out to bribe the Mohmands and Shinwaris to do the fighting for the Afghans. The Mohmands took the money and the Shinwaris got some also, but neither tribe did very much in the way of attacking. In order to prevent the Amir sending them daily orders to attack us and have done with it, they cut the telephone wire from Kabul in several places and saw to it that it was not repaired. That was one reason, said the Gupdar, why news from Kabul was slow in coming. Letters had to come by hand, and very few Afghans were making the journey across the border.

But the Shinwaris and the Mohmands were not the only tribesmen who might be brought to assist the Amir. Money was sent to the Afridis and it was pointed out to them how easy it would be for them to destroy the British lines of communication in the Khyber itself, and perhaps even close to Peshawar.

The Afridis were ripe for treachery. They often are. The levies we have employed in the Pass under various names, Khyber Rifles, Khyber Militia, Khyber Levies and so on, have revolted on several occasions. In 1897 they were the first almost to block the Pass they were paid to keep open. On the present occasion certainly they remained loyal for several months but the temptation provided both by the Amir's money and by the spectacle of long convoys of food and munitions passing up the road every day was too much for them.

One morning when they were supposed to be picketing the Pass they began to fire into the transport near Ali Masjid. All the levies did not take part in this shooting, but it was enough to stop the movement of transport up and down the Pass. The next day nearly all the pickets were firing at the transport which had begun to move again, it being thought that the affair of the day before was merely the kind of sniping by a few malcontents that might be expected in the Khyber. This time, of course, traffic was stopped entirely and a move was made to clear the Pass of all the levies and of anybody else who might be inclined to join them. Others were so inclined, and a big lashkar came down from the hills and occupied positions near Fort Maude. There was also word of another considerable lashkar collecting round Ali Masjid and



preparing to attack the brigade that was in camp there.

On the fourth day an engagement took place near Fort Maude. The road here does not pass through any kind of deep defile, but climbs round and upwards through a series of small, round hills, very much the kind of country in which took place that battle with the Mohmands which I have described in a previous chapter. Very often have I pondered over the reason why Pathan tribesmen avoid fighting their battles in deep defiles, at the bottom of which our troops have to march in very narrow columns. In the early days of Frontier fighting, defiles were the places chosen by Pathans in which to lay ambushes and fight their battles. I think the reason for the change in tactics is the long-range rifle. Men perched amongst precipitous cliffs and rocks cannot slip away very easily once they are spotted. They can be shot at both from below and from the opposite side of the defile, but in muzzle-loading days this was not possible and the tribesmen could almost come out in the open to roll great stones down the hill. Whatever the cause, tribesmen no longer occupy precipices or snipe from them unless they happen to be on the very top of the hill and have no steep face to climb.

The action near Fort Maude was prolonged for many hours because of the way in which the Afridis

dodged amongst the low hills. It was not a case of merely pushing them back a certain distance and then returning to camp; the whole gathering had to be dispersed entirely so that the Pass might be clear. I was told that at one time when a certain point which the Afridis held was being shelled one or two Afridis produced a flag with which they signalled 'miss,' 'high left,' 'low right.' Our shells were being dropped over the brow of the hill and the gunners could not quite see where they fell. My informant thought this sporting of the Afridis, and was disappointed when I told him that the enemy were not being sporting at all, but were merely taking advantage of our sporting character which they understood very well. 'Do you believe,' I said, 'that those signals were correct signals? Of course they were not. When they signalled a miss the shell was probably too close to the target.' That, I think, was the correct explanation of the flag-wagging.

But we were in strong force, and in due course we had occupied all the pickets that had been held by the levies and the Pass seemed to be clear again. Ali Masjid reported that there had been no attack on the camp. So it was thought that all danger was now over. But late that night a large body of Afridis did try and rush a portion of the camp at Ali Masjid. There was a great deal of shooting in the

darkness and we had many casualties, but the camp was not penetrated at any point, though several determined rushes were made. In the morning all the Afridis had disappeared. Traffic began to move again; all the pickets were held by Indian troops and there was no more trouble in the Khyber Pass, except for that occasional sniping by occasional rascals, which is a feature of the Pass in time of trouble.

But the Afridis did make one last attempt on our line of communications. This was not in the Pass, but quite close to Peshawar, a few miles from Jamrud. The tribesmen determined to derail and loot a train which was crammed with supplies and ammunaitions for the front. They seemed to have drifted across the Jamrud Plain in twos and threes during the night and hidden in a nullah during the next day. Then, when it was dark, they crawled to a spot within twenty or thirty yards of the railway line. There they dug a trench in which they concealed themselves, waiting for a train which left Peshawar at 9.30 in the evening. The train was stopped, and immediately it did so, a concentrated fire was poured into it. I think the engine driver and fireman were killed, and the guard wounded. These trains always carried a few sepöys as armed guards, but this particular train had attached to it two or three carriages containing troops going up

### THE THIRD AFGHAN WAR

to the front. The Afridis had not expected this and were taken utterly by surprise when the troops scrambled out of the carriages from the further side and opened fire on them. The rush they intended to make was never made and presently the firing died away. Of course troops came out from Jamrud to see what was happening and by next morning a pursuit was organised; but it is not possible to pursue people into the ravines and nullahs surrounding Jamrud. This was the last occasion on which any serious attempt was made upon our line of communications – at least, on that side of the Khyber.

Several weeks passed and the only news available related to what was happening in Afghanistan itself. My Gupdar said that affairs in the capital had now become normal. He said that the Afghan General, Nadir Khan, had left Kabul on some secret mission and that there were no signs of any warlike activity anywhere. The Amir, apparently, was content to leave the war to be carried on by tribesmen. He evidently thought that we would not push on beyond Dakha. Very possibly, his information about our policy was correct, for the British Government, and the Indian Government too, I suppose, did not want the war to be prolonged. The British element amongst our troops wanted to be demobilised for the majority of the British troops

in India at that time were not regulars but territorials. They were in process of being sent home after the Armistice when the Amir made his attack on the Khyber and they had to be told that they would have to wait till this new war was over. Besides, this war was costing a great deal of money just at the time when need for retrenchment was most apparent.

These facts were discussed very openly in messes and clubs in India and I have no doubt that word of what was being said duly reached Kabul. Then, one day, my Gupdar said to me with some excitement: 'The war is going to blaze up more fiercely. Something is afoot. A letter has reached the Amir from somebody and he is very excited. What is about to happen will certainly be known in a day or two in Peshawar.'

'Where is it about to happen?'

'We don't know. But it is reported that there will be two attacks somewhere, and one attack may be on Pabbi.'

This story was too vague to be put in any message, but I remember mentioning it to a staff officer and his remark was: 'What can happen at Pabbi?' Pabbi, I should mention, is a small railway-station a few miles south of Peshawar.

A few days afterwards an officer at the hotel, who had just come up from below, told me that when

### THE THIRD AFGHAN WAR

passing through Pabbi he had seen the railway-station crowded with troops who seemed to be on duty there. Naturally, I came to the conclusion that the report which the Gupdar had brought to me had also reached Army Headquarters. So I was agog to see what would happen at the other unknown place. Something did happen, but not in the Peshawar district at all. Our troops at Thal, who never knew that any Afghans were within striking distance of them, suddenly found their camp bombarded from the hills above them. This was no sniping, but real shelling. Cannon had been brought up against a frontier post for the first time. The shell-fire was fairly accurate; a hay-stack was set on fire, and when the smoke of it rose into the sky, distant figures were seen on the hill-tops dancing for joy. Though the troops were taken by surprise, they do not appear to have been much disturbed. The post and the camp were put in a position of defence and pickets were sent out. But the Afghans made no attempt to rush the camp.

That afternoon word was brought into the camp that the Afghan General, Nadir Khan, was commanding the Afghans and that large numbers of Wazirs had attached themselves to him. An anxious night or two was spent by the small garrison, but no attack was pressed home. It turned out that Nadir Khan's force of regulars was very small, and that

he wanted the Wazirs to rush the post and the camp. They did not want to do it, though they were in numbers large enough to make a successful attack probable.

The garrison at Thal consisted, I think, of only a single regiment of Indian Infantry and some details. As a matter of fact, the regiment had orders to leave Thal because it was thought that Thal was too out of the way to be attacked and there was no road there from the Afghan side. The battalion was ready to go, the mules being loaded up, when the first Afghan shell fell into the camp. The garrison naturally expected that the Wazirs would swoop down on them, for they were in the hills above in thousands, but somehow no attack was made. The reason for this escape was discovered later.

A few words should be said here about the Wazirs. In the years before the World War, they were hardly considered a fighting tribe, and at any rate were put far below the Mohmands and Afridis as warriors. Opinion has now changed. The fact is that in earlier days the Wazirs were badly armed, for as soon as they obtained weapons of precision they turned out to be even more formidable than the other tribes. At the time when Thal was in peril the fighting ability of the Wazirs was well known and the garrison naturally had a very anxious time; so had the rest of the army, because it would have

been a tremendous blow to British prestige had Thal been actually captured. Further, capture by Wazirs would also mean the massacre of every man in the garrison. General Nadir Khan probably understood the conventions of civilised warfare, but his allies, the Wazirs, certainly did not.

All haste was made by the army authorities, both at Simla and Peshawar, to send reinforcements to Thal. A relief column was organised under that very General Dyer who some months previously had been in command of the troops at Lahore and Amritsar at a time of civil tumult and commotion.

Now it is not easy to reinforce Thal from the Peshawar side because there is no direct railway communication. Troops had to be sent down to Wazirabad and then up by a narrow-gauge railway, across the Indus, and thence by road. There was forced marching and the column was able to arrive at Thal before any determined assault was attempted upon the camp. In the battle that followed, the Wazirs took no part; in fact, they retired farther into the hills. The Afghans were outmanœuvred and had to retire quickly. They abandoned their camp. Now it was seen what the Wazirs had been waiting for; they swept down upon the camp and looted it thoroughly. Then they, too, went back to their own villages. With the Afghans in retreat and the Wazirs back in their own homes what



might have been a real threat to our arms disappeared.

But though the Afghans did not succeed in capturing Thal their sudden appearance in front of it was in a sense a feat of arms. In spite of our surveys and spies no one seemed to know that there was a direct route to Thal from Afghanistan. Nadir Khan was able, not only to move his troops along this route, but to bring his guns with him, up the hills and across the nullahs. He was able to raise the tribes in a sense, and to do this all so secretly that the garrison at Thal did not know he was in the vicinity till the first shell fell into the camp.

It may be thought very strange that the British Army in India should be unaware of all the tracks or paths that lead into India from Afghanistan. It is strange, and I still cannot make out how Nadir Khan was able to effect his surprise.

There are five great passes leading from Afghanistan into India, passes which can be used by loaded camels. These are the Khyber, the Kurram, the Tochi, the Gomal, and the Bolan. The Khyber at that time we held in great strength as it was the direct route into India from Kabul. The Kurram, the Tochi and the Gomal were watched. The Bolan, of course, had ceased to be a pass from Afghanistan into India ever since we had annexed that part of the country known as Baluchistan, and

so got on the farther side of the Pass. We had a big garrison on the farther side. Nadir Khan had come over the Kurram and it was thought might make an attempt to march down the Kurram Valley. Instead of doing so he had turned sharply to his left and gone up the hill, following a route which led him to Thal.

The Afghans did not consider the retirement of Nadir Khan from Thal as a defeat. They thought it a victory, because, at any rate, the Afghan troops had penetrated a good distance into border territory and taken us by surprise. In fact, the Amir Amanullah sent his congratulations to Nadir Khan, who was invited to come back to Kabul and assume general charge of the operations against the British.

A year or two later, a monument of victory in memory of this affair was erected at Kabul. The memorial took the form of an Afghan warrior with his foot on the dead body of a lion, the British lion. Afghans were very proud of this memorial, but one day they found that somebody had come along and knocked the head off the warrior. The Amir was very angry about this and so was the General. The British Legation at Kabul was accused of having instigated the outrage. It shows much for the estimation in which the 'word of an Englishman' is held in Afghanistan when I add that on the British Minister denying all knowledge of the affair, his denial was accepted at once. But a very strict

enquiry was set on foot. The man who had attacked the monument was found actually boasting in the bazaar about what he had done. This was the time when Amanullah's popularity was on the wane, and orthodox Afghans thought that he was becoming Europeanised. Amongst very orthodox Mussulmans that commandment is taken very seriously which says, 'Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth.' This figure of an Afghan warrior was too much for the champion of orthodoxy and so he hit it with an axe. I have been told that the man was not punished very severely for fear of rousing the mob. Who was to know that in a few years the British Government was going to lend its support to Nadir Khan's bid for the throne of Afghanistan?

While I am on the subject of the Afghan Passes, I might as well say what happened on the farther side of the Bolan Pass, and so complete in a way the story of the Afghan War. 'Across the Pass is our large military station of Quetta to which a railway has been built, with an extension to New Chaman' which is on the Afghan border. The country between Quetta and the Afghan border is fairly level and continues to be level as far as Kandahar. In the old days of the Russian peril it was believed that in

the event of a war between England and Russia the latter would certainly attempt to push a railway as far as Kandahar, but we determined to get there first in the event of war and so railway materials were collected in great abundance at New Chaman ready to be laid down the moment the word was given. Naturally, when the Afghan War started, immediate steps were taken to further reinforce Quetta, and, if necessary, push the railway on towards Kandahar.

The Amir Amanullah, after he had made his amazing attack on the Khyber, sent an old but resolute Minister of his to take charge of the Kandahar Province. This man, Abdul Kaddus, had been a favourite with the Amir Abdur Rahman, and was much respected by all Afghans. He went down to Kandahar and then finally took up his residence at a great mud fort known as Spin Baldak, a few miles from the frontier at New Chaman. It was thought that the arrival of Abdul Kaddus at the fort must be the preliminary to an attack on New Chaman. Further precautions were taken at Quetta; more troops were sent up.

In India, people thought that our proper course was to attack and take this frontier fort instead of allowing Abdul Kaddus to select his own opportunity for attacking us, but nothing was done for several months and I think that if Nadir Khan had

not appeared in front of Thal, nothing would have been done at any time. But the Thal affair showed the danger of leaving the initiative to the Afghans and preparations were made for an assault on Spin Baldak. I asked for permission to leave Peshawar and go to Quetta to see the operations, but the answer was no.

Once in the old days before the Great War I had watched a mud fort being built in an Indian State and the business was remarkably interesting. How do you build a sixteen-foot thick mud wall? People who do not know how it is done would probably reply that the mud is just piled up till it reaches the requisite height and has the requisite thickness. But how would such a pile of mud stick together? Would it not crack and fall to pieces in dry weather? The Indian mud forts have endured for centuries, just as if they had been made of concrete. The secret is this. Any mud will do. It is mixed with water, and when in a semi-fluid state it is picked up in small quantities by the fingers and softly rolled into the shape of an egg, not a large egg, one hardly bigger than a pigeon's. This egg is then flung violently to the ground, on the spot where the foundations begin. Another egg is thrown at the first egg and so on, until the whole of the fort is outlined by mud eggs, one next to the other along the whole site. Water is then poured over the eggs

and another layer is made in the same way, and built up. The builders would tell you that the smaller the eggs the stronger would be the fort. The business of building is very tedious, but in the East time is nothing and labour is very cheap. Year by year the fortress grows, almost imperceptibly. Sixteen feet is an average thickness of an outer wall and a boy employed in making these eggs and flinging them at a growing wall may reach middle age before that wall is completed.

Mud is very good material for resisting rifle fire, and when you have sixteen feet of mud you have something which will resist field guns quite easily. Another advantage of mud is that it does not splinter when struck by a shell.

Now, this Spin Baldak was a mud fort of mud forts, and there was a general belief amongst Afghans that it was impregnable. When our troops marched out of New Chaman no attempt was made to interfere with the movement because it was believed that we would not be so crazy as to attack the fort. But Abdul Haddus certainly sent a letter in which he suggested that there should be no fighting on this front. Both parties, he said, were far removed from the tumult and strife of the Peshawar front. Why could they not continue at peace? To his simple, almost pastoral, epistle the reply was made that as Afghanistan was at war with

us it was not possible for us to differentiate between one part of Afghanistan and another. The only way to avoid fighting on this side was for him to surrender the fort. To this the old man replied that he was sorry he could not accede to the British proposition. If we wanted the fort we must come and take it.

So one day the British force marched to Spin Baldak and prepared to assault it. The fort was certainly full of Afghan soldiers, but there were not as many big guns as might have been expected in a fort that was supposed to be impregnable. I do not believe we had any casualties from Afghan guns. The men who fell were shot down. After a preliminary shelling which did not do much damage to the mud walls of the fort, assaults were made, quite in the old style of warfare, by storming columns which had to face a good deal of rifle fire before they got to the walls. Some actual scaling had to be done and this was done by our troops, both British and Indian, in a most gallant way. Curiously enough I have never been able to meet a single man of the eight or ten thousand troops who took part in the assault, and I have nothing to go upon except what I remember of the official communiqué on the subject, which was very brief. It would seem that once our troops were over the walls and into the fort the Afghan resistance collapsed. The garrison

made their way out of the fort as quickly as possible. Presently the Union Jack was flying in the place of the representation of twin castles which is the Afghan emblem.

The garrison did not apparently run very far. It hung about a few miles outside the fort, and once or twice attempts were made to interrupt communications; but the attempts were half-hearted and very little mischief was done.



## STRANGE END TO A WAR

But this is a personal narrative, and, as I was not at Spin Baldak I had better return to affairs at Peshawar. I have said before that the Press censor told me that I would be allowed to go up to the front on a quiet day. There was not very much fun in going up on a quiet day, but still when I was told by an officer, Captain Finlay, that I could come up to Dakha with him on the following day I was very pleased. For one thing I was anxious to see what the country was like beyond Landi Khana, and I relished the prospect of a drive with Finlay. He was a most remarkable man, for he was the Chief Intelligence Officer with the army in India; at least, he was Intelligence Officer for the whole of the Himalayan Frontier right away from Assam to Afghanistan. I was told that he knew everything that was to be known, both about our own movements and about those of the enemy.

So one fine morning off we went in his car. The drive to Landi Khana showed me that there were many more troops in the Khyber than I had expected. There were large camps at Jamrud, Fort

Maude, Ali Masjid, Landi Kotal and Landi Khana, and it was quite obvious that no Afghan army could ever hope to penetrate into India that way. The pickets were now held by British or Indian troops, the Afridi levies having been disbanded owing to their treacherous conduct not so long before.

The Khyber is not a real defile till past Ali Masjid. Then the valley narrows for a time and broadens up again till it ends in the wide plain of the Kotal. The descent down the other side of the Pass is steep and in some places the valley almost becomes a gorge. As explained before, in the modern days the steep and precipitous parts of the Pass are no longer considered proper places for an ambush by the Afridis, and I noticed that when we came to them no special precautions seemed to have been taken by the British troops. Still, the Khyber is always impressive. You cannot pass through it without getting some kind of an impression of the old dark days when armies perished in those defiles.

But it was after passing Landi Khana that one got a real sense of danger and even of terror. There were high and tumultuous banks on each side of the road covered with a kind of shrub. One felt at once that one was in a new and desperate country where there was no regard for human life. There was very little traffic in the road; in fact, I do not think we passed a single car. Every now and then we

caught a glimpse of pickets in commanding positions above the road, but the pickets were not very prominent and I imagine that the soldiers in them had been directed not to show themselves too much. We passed a few people on foot, villagers of some kind, who saluted us very respectfully, though there was a small party consisting of two men and a boy who did not salute, and the boy even made an impudent gesture of the kind common to boys all over the world. These people were not Mussulmans, but Bedi Sikhs who in Afghanistan form an important part of the trading community. Finlay told me that the Bedi Sikhs in Afghanistan were always rude to foreigners because they wanted to show that they formed a part of the Afghan population.

After a fairly long drive we turned a corner and there was Dakha in front of us. The little town was set in a plain of which a large part was taken up with the tents of the brigade in camp there. I was surprised to see that the whole of the right flank of the camp lay exposed to enemy fire. I did not see any trenches or breastworks of any kind to protect our camp. It is true that the Kabul river lay on that side, but it was not very broad at this point and it seemed to me that snipers on the farther side had the camp at their mercy. On the left and in front were a series of rocks and low hills which one saw were strongly held by our pickets.

## **STRANGE END TO A WAR**

But why was the right flank left exposed in this way? I put the matter to Finlay and he said that the farther bank of the river was held by the Khan of Lalpura who had not joined the Amir in the war against the British, although he was supposed to be a subject of the Amir. Moreover, the little town of Lalpura itself was supposed to be quite wealthy as towns go in that part of the world. The whole of it, as I could see for myself, lay at the mercy of our guns. It had been explained to the Khan that if there was sniping into our camp from the other side, our field guns would immediately destroy the town. There was some sniping one night, and next morning we sent a shell or two into the town. Immediately a small party came across the river from Lalpura to say that the snipers had come from a distant part and that the Khan intended in future to put out pickets to see that they did not come again. Please would we not shell the town. Thereafter there was peace between us and the Khan.

Finlay had apparently really come to Dakha on some secret business of his own. Once we were inside the camp he told me he would have to leave me for a little while because he had to interview somebody. I asked him if I could go up and look at the view from one of the pickets on the right, but he said there would not be time. There was time as it turned out, because I had to wait in the car, so my

disgust, for nearly two hours. Then, when Finlay did arrive, he said it was rather late and we had better hurry back, because it would not do to be caught in the Khyber after dark.

As it turned out we were nearly caught by darkness, if not in the Khyber, at least a little way out of it. Just before we got to Jamrud the car broke down for some reason. I am one of those rare people who do not pretend to know everything about horses and cars. I sat in the car while Finlay fiddled about with it and did all those intricate things which a man must do when his car stops. We did get going again at last and drove triumphantly into Peshawar. For some reason I did not tell the Press censor that I had been to Dakha with Finlay, and I remember how surprised he was some days later, when, the subject of Dakha coming up, I indicated that I knew all about the situation of the camp.

Only one other chance of going up the Khyber was given to me and this chance was due to that astonishing soldier, General Dobell. He happened to see me one morning at Army Headquarters, and as he was a man who talked to all strangers he came up to me and fell into conversation. At that time I had been ordered to remove all badges of rank from my uniform, and in place of my stars I put on my shoulders a broad yellow strip. I got this idea from

what I had seen in China. The American correspondents did it because, it was said, they were proud to think that they belonged to the Yellow Press. I thought this was an amusing idea, hence the yellow band.

Dobell was struck by this; he did not know what rank it represented or who I could be. I explained to him and added that I had only recently been demobilised. He was very surprised that I should have permitted myself to leave the army and he asked me why I had not stayed on. To this I replied that I was not asked to stay on and, in any case, there would be no prospects in the army for a man who, at my age, had attained no rank higher than that of captain. Dobell replied to the effect that it was better to be a private soldier in the army than a man of position outside the army. I may have smiled faintly at this, for the General relented and asked me if I would go round the hospitals with him.

I am very fond of visiting military hospitals in time of war because of this theory of mine about the *arme blanche*. I always enquire for men with bayonet and similar wounds, and I am always told there are none. Such was certainly the case in the Peshawar hospital. There were a number of men in with fevers of various kinds, and Dobell seemed to be more concerned about these men than the

## A ROVING COMMISSION

wounded men. On our round I listened to an unusual conversation that took place between him and a sergeant of a territorial regiment. I have said before that the British troops in India were not very keen about the Afghan War, because they thought that the Great War being over they should be demobilised. The sergeant said, very boldly I thought, to the General that he was dissatisfied when he was asked whether he was satisfied or not with his present state.

The General, coldly: 'And why are you dissatisfied?'

'Because, sir, I thought I was going home, whereas I have been kept here.'

'Do you know why you have been kept here?'

'Yes, sir, to fight Afghans. I did not enlist to fight Afghans. I enlisted to fight Germans.'

'My man,' said the General, 'I know your kind very well. You did not enlist to fight at all. If you had any kind of fighting instinct you would be glad to be in Peshawar at the present time.' With that, the General turned on his heel and walked out of the ward. A little while later he turned to me and asked me why I was not up at the front. I explained about my position and added that I had been told I would not be allowed up, even if I bought my own motor-car. 'You shall go up, my boy,' said the General. 'I'll lend you my car. There is time

## STRANGE END TO A WAR

enough for you to go up to Ali Masjid and be back again before dark.'

So this time I went up the Pass, or at least nearly half way up, in a divisional car. There was ample time really, and I was able, on the way, to call on several units that I knew and partake of refreshment. I saw, then, under what oppressive conditions the troops were living. The heat was simply intolerable. I had not felt it so hot even in Mesopotamia. In addition to the heat the troops suffered from a blinding dust, and, I imagine in some parts the pickets must have had very little water. Certainly the troops were much better fed than in the pre-War days when campaigning on the Frontier, but all the food in the world will not compensate for the lassitude, depression and weakness that are the inevitable consequences of living in a temperature above a hundred degrees. On that day, at Jamrud, the thermometer registered 115 degrees and I was told that it had been steady at 112 degrees for several days.

At Ali Masjid I climbed up the hill on which the fort is situated, where I found that the garrison up there was provided by a regiment I knew very well. I was received gladly and word was sent down to other officers in the valley to say that I had come. Refreshments were provided and when I was asked whether I would stay to dinner I consented readily.



I was looking forward to a night of revelry and song when the cold thought struck me that I had the General's car and had to be back in it by dark. When I told the others this they reluctantly agreed with me that perhaps I had better return the car as promised, for it was not for nothing that the General was known as 'Tiger' Dobell. So I had to go back to Peshawar. There was never any revelry there in those days. The Headquarters Staff were late workers sitting pale by the midnight lamp. The common troops went to bed early, except the Air Force.

So far I have not mentioned the Air Force at all. Though we were in the year 1919 and the War had released literally thousands of machines, Peshawar seemed only to possess six or seven. The majority of these were obsolete machines and the others were Handley-Pages of a kind that would now be called family biplanes. They were slow and ponderous and it was with difficulty that they could be induced to rise over a certain height which would be considered ridiculously low in these days. It was believed that they could not fly over the Khyber Pass. And yet it was a Handley-Page which I verily believe won the Afghan War.

It was my intention, when I first came to Peshawar, to call on the officers at the aerodrome, but you know how these things happen. I was

always intending to call, but never called. Perhaps if I had I would have got some of that revelry by night of which I was deprived at Ali Masjid. The Air Force has a kind of reputation for keeping it up. They used to sing, I am told, that terrible song which is entitled 'Revelry by Night'

Stand to your glasses, steady,  
Here's one to the dead already,  
And one to the next man who dies.

Every time these daring airmen of Peshawar went out they were risking death in their obsolete machines. It was not merely a case of the possibility of being shot down, but a case of a machine failing in a very bad country, where there were no landing grounds and where a forced descent would mean death. If by a miracle an airman survived a crash he would be falling into the hands of a savage enemy, for, as I have said, the bulk of the enemy consisted not of trained troops, but of tribesmen.

We used to see a plane or two circling about every day. A plane or two ! Yes, that is what we had come to, owing to the neglect of the frontier defences by the Government. When the Handley-Page made its vital flight, it took everybody by surprise. The details of the flight were not made known at the time, but I think I had the full story before many days, not from the civil or military

## **A ROVING COMMISSION**

authorities, or from anybody in the Air Force, but from that Gupdar of whom I have spoken before as a man who gave me very reliable information. He did not know the names of the two officers who flew the machine, but I discovered afterwards that one was a Captain Villiers.

One fine morning the machine took off loaded with bombs. It flew laboriously over the Pass and to Jelalabad, where it dropped a bomb over an enormous tent which had been erected in a park in the city. This tent, the flyers thought, must be a meeting place. The tent was destroyed. By a lucky fluke a tomb which it covered was not destroyed. This tomb was the tomb of the late Amir Habbi-bullah. The Afghans thought that this bombing of the shamiana was a very deliberate act of malice and revenge. They were pleased that the tomb itself was not damaged, but they also thought that our aeroplanes were very accurate with bombs.

The machine flew on towards Kabul. Somewhere near or in the Jagdallak Pass it met a very big convoy of camels bringing in supplies of ammunition and food for the Mohmand tribesmen who were facing us at Dakha. The machine was heavily fired on by an escort with the convoy, but it dropped three or four bombs amongst the camels trailing along the precipitous road, and flew on, still

## **STRANGE END TO A WAR**

towards Kabul. I do not think the airmen realised quite what they had done, but the bombs were accurately placed and a sort of panic spread amongst the camels and their drivers. Many animals may not have been killed by the bombs, but large numbers, according to my story, fell down the precipice and were killed at the bottom of the valley. The strange part of this affair was that even after the aeroplane was out of sight panic continued to occur amongst the camels, or perhaps amongst their drivers. In the end a very large part of the convoy was destroyed or, rather, destroyed itself.

The aeroplane continued on its way to Kabul. There it dropped four or five bombs after circling over the city, and caused another panic. It was not stated that the bombs killed many people or destroyed any important buildings, but people ran about screaming and despairing, afraid apparently that this bombardment was merely a preliminary to something tremendous that was preparing. Very shortly after the Handley-Bage had gone a deputation was sent to the Amir imploring him to make peace at once, for otherwise the whole city would be in ruins in a few days. The Amir Amanullah was not himself frightened, because he knew that we had very few aeroplanes, but he made some kind of promise which induced the deputation to go away. The Amir, I think, hoped that in a few days the

people of Kabul would forget about the whole affair, and that the plane would not return.

It did not return, but in the course of a couple of days certain Shinwaris, who were the drivers or owners of the camels destroyed in the Jagdallak, arrived in Kabul. They demanded to see the Amir and they told him that not a single Shinwari driver or camel would ever approach the front again. They were not going to be destroyed by bombs from the air. The reports by these men served to alarm further the population of Kabul. The Amir was forced to summon his council which decided that a message should be sent to the Indian Government suggesting an armistice. The troops were to remain in position but no fighting was to take place.

When I got hold of this information I did not attempt to make use of it at once. I do not know what the Government of India heard, but the whole story was all over Peshawar before any hint escaped from the Press censor that a truce was in the air. The first thing I heard officially was that a group of Afghan horsemen had approached our pickets at Landi Khana with a white flag. They said they carried a letter. The letter asked for a truce of the kind stated above and our reply to it was: 'Send along your officers to negotiate.' In due course some Afghan officers arrived at Dakha, but it was presently found that they were not of high rank;

the most senior of them was no more than a captain. We refused to have anything to do with these men and sent word that no person would be treated with who held a rank below that of Sirdar.

The progress of events was not marked by any official communications. Nobody quite knew what was going to happen, and as a consequence the troops were very restless. It was getting hotter and hotter and the British troops were more and more anxious to get away.

One day my Gupdar told me that he had certain information that the Amir was sending a group of persons to negotiate not merely an armistice, but a treaty; that these persons were men of the highest rank in Kabul, and that the negotiations would take place at Rawalpindi where bungalows had already been engaged to house the delegation. I thought that it would be well to go down to Rawalpindi and to find out the truth of the story about bungalows being hired, and also to enable me to send off a few messages which would not be censored because there was no censorship at Rawalpindi. I told a number of officers at Peshawar what my information was and why I was going to Pindi, and they said, 'We will know if you do not come back that peace is at hand, so we certainly hope that we do not see your face again.'

Down at Pindi I found that my Gupdar's news

## A ROVING COMMISSION

was quite correct and that bungalows had been engaged. No information was available from the civil authorities, but the Gupdar had sent word to a friend in Pindi who was also a Gupdar and who would assist me to obtain information. This man came along with a long beard and in a long robe, declaring himself to be a munshi and ready to teach me any oriental language that I liked. I said, 'Very well, you can teach me Pushtu.' So it was on the pretence of receiving Pushtu lessons that I saw my intelligence man daily. He was quite as good as the other. Amongst the things he told me was that Simla was preparing to send a delegation to meet the Afghans and the two delegations would consider the peace terms together.

Then affairs began to drag. Nothing happened. I imagine the Afghans thought that if they delayed sending a delegation they need not send one at all, for we might get wearied of keeping our troops in the Khyber and at Dakha.

As nothing was doing at Pindi I went back to Peshawar, where I was greeted with jeers and groans, because it was thought my return meant that the war was to continue. Then, one day, my former Gupdar said that the Afghan delegation had actually left Kabul. Two or three days later a communiqué from Simla gave the names of the British delegation and added that the negotiations would take place at

Rawalpindi. Sir Hamilton Grant was to preside over the deliberations and amongst the members was to be a man whose presence in the delegation puzzled everybody at Peshawar because not a single officer on the Headquarters Staff had ever heard of him. This delegate was Sir Gurmukh Singh Bedi. I asked my Gupdar about him and he said that Sir Gurmukh was an extremely wealthy Bedi Sikh whose family had had financial relations with Kabul for many years. The Afghan Minister of Finance was among the Afghan delegation and possibly financial matters would also come up for discussion during the negotiations.

In due course the Afghan delegation arrived at Peshawar, and I made haste to get down to Rawalpindi, telling my friends that they would not see my face again. It happened that the regiment from which I had been demobilised about two months before was now forming part of the garrison at Rawalpindi and I went to live with it during my stay there. The officers had their own bungalows, but there was an empty bungalow near the mess which I took possession of. (I think I might, in an aside, say something about these bungalows. In Punjab cantonments they were mostly owned by wealthy men who, during the War, showed their loyalty by refusing to ask for rent from officers who lived in them. Local contractors furnished the



bungalows and there they were, ready for anybody to walk into. I know I have occupied bungalows both in Jhelum and in Pindi without paying any rent. In the present case I had my meals with the 2/150th and was able to keep them informed day by day of the progress of events.)

In due course the two deputations arrived. I went to see the secretary to the British delegation and he turned out to be the very Mr. Maffey who was secretary to Sir Roos Keppel, Chief Commissioner of the Frontier Province. Maffey told me that I could not be present at the sittings of the Peace Commission, except at the opening ceremony and on the day that the treaty was signed; but he would be glad to see me privately any or every morning, and he would give me such information as was available. He had said the same thing at Peshawar. I used to see him very regularly there; in fact, I had to see him regularly, because he was the civil Press censor. But he personally had given me, at Peshawar, no information of any real value. I did not expect much news from him at Rawalpindi and I was not disappointed because I got nothing to speak of. Maffey (now Sir Charles) has had so great a career that people who refer to him to-day hardly know that shortly after being secretary to the Peace Commission he became Chief Commissioner of the Frontier Province. I saw a sketch of his life

the other day and the writer seemed to think that Maffey was unknown till he was sent to the Sudan. I cannot say I ever resented Maffey's secrecy. I suppose secrecy was part of his job. Besides, I managed (thanks to these Gupdars) to get enough news about what was going on to satisfy my newspapers and myself.

Now I was to learn the real joys of finding out news of what was going on in high places. I had something of that joy in Peshawar, but at Pindi all kinds of things that were being debated at Simla and in London cropped up and these things were matters of high policy.

The opening of the deliberations of the two peace deputations was attended by a few visitors who had been specially asked, I suppose, and myself. I was particularly interested in the Afghan deputation. All the members of that deputation had the rank of Sirdar and were members of the Executive Council in Kabul. They were Ministers. Two or three of them were soldiers of high rank and appeared in uniform. All the Afghans were big men and the soldiers were a bit heavier than one would associate with people that were leading an active life. But the man who interested me most was the Finance Minister who formed one of the Afghan deputation. He was not an Afghan, but a Hindu, and although they called him a Bedi Sikh, I do not

know whether he professed any kind of Sikhism. He was a very tall, fine man with an eagle eye, and gave one the impression of possessing a strong and resourceful character.

When the two deputations took their seats on each side of the table, with Sir Hamilton Grant at the top, there was a good deal of pushing and struggling amongst the Afghans, as to who was to sit nearest to him. No one wanted to be at the bottom of the table. A delegate to whom a low seat was left suddenly got up, moved five or six seats higher, and then thrust himself between two of his fellow members who at first refused to make room for him and then finally gave in with a bad grace.

The Afghans brought with them two secretaries or shorthand writers. The proceedings were in Persian and the men were supposed to take down every word. I do not know to what caste or community they belonged, though they might have been Persians. They looked very pale and timid and I felt rather sorry for them. I remember my own feelings when I was first asked to take down the speeches on a big occasion and found that the chief speaker, who was Lord Roberts, was too fast for me. But I had very little to fear beyond some kind of a reproof for not getting down all that the speaker had said, whereas these shorthand writers would, I imagined, have severe punishment to face

if they blundered or left out any important detail. Everybody in those days had an impression that the Afghan officials were very strict with their subordinates and that any who offended them in any way were liable to death. I noticed that when the proceedings started the two men were trembling with fright, but as the speeches went on they recovered their composure. The reason was that as all the British delegation did not understand Persian, every speech had to be translated, sentence by sentence. On this opening occasion nothing of any importance was said on either side. Flowery remarks were made about how happy the members of the two delegations were to meet one another and how they hoped that, by the time they had finished, a peace that would last for ever would be signed. The proceedings did not last very long, and presently everybody got up, and there was an end to that day's work.

The Afghans had brought with them a special escort consisting of soldiers and armed bodyguards of various kinds. I had not much time to look at them on that first morning, but I determined on another occasion to study them closely and see if I could get anything out of them. These men had not been allowed into the room when the meeting was being held. I noticed that when the deputation arrived they tried to follow their masters into the

room and were very disconcerted when they were told that they had to sit outside.

Next morning I came again; saw Maffey, who told me nothing, and then hung about till the Afghans arrived in their several cars, each car carrying, not only one or two members of the deputation, but five or six soldiers or bodyguards. When the members of the deputation had disappeared into the meeting I joined the soldiers and others who were sitting about on benches in the hall, and tried to get into conversation with them. Most of them pretended not to understand what I said. They did not look like ordinary Afghan soldiers. I think they were Hazaras, a people of Mongolian origin who have settled in Afghanistan and profess a kind of Mohammedanism; they are very Mongolian in their physique and features, even to the extent of not being able to grow any hair on their faces. But the most interesting men were the two who came with the Hindu Finance Minister. Like him, they were tall and stately, but whereas the other bodyguards carried weapons that looked to me very much like our newest short magazine rifle with large aperture sights, the Finance Minister's men had an American Winchester rifle of the kind which has one barrel under another, the second barrel being a sort of magazine to hold cartridges. When I spoke to one of these men he, like the others,

refused to answer, although he must have understood what I said. I imagine that they had been told on no account to talk to any Europeans; they probably took me for some kind of a blundering spy.

It would be tedious to relate the progress of the deliberations from day to day as I gathered them from the Gupdar. I remember one day asking him how on earth he knew what was happening in the secret meeting room, and how he got news of what Simla thought or what Kabul thought. I was putting into my messages to Reuter and my newspapers a good deal of what I heard from the Gupdar, but I was glad in any case that there was no censorship at Rawalpindi. Had I been obliged to take everything I wrote to Maffey he would certainly have made some enquiries as to how and where I got the information. At Peshawar the civil authorities thought I got my information from the military and *vice versa*. The Gupdar told me that there was no very great mystery about the sources of his information. He said that nothing was a secret in India. Everybody was curious and everybody gabbled. When the members of the Afghan delegation had finished the day's work and returned to the houses in which they lived there were always large numbers of visitors waiting to see them. These visitors were men of all classes and interviews with

them and the serving of refreshments, at the expense of the Government of India, went on to a late hour of the night. Next day Rawalpindi city knew everything that was worth knowing about the peace deliberations.

One thing I learned, but did not at the time pass on, was that the Afghan delegation was not observing a very strict neutrality, by which I mean that, although they were members of a peace deputation, they were in contact with certain disruptive elements in India. Letters were exchanged with, and interviews granted to, men who were actively hostile to the Indian Government. One strange fact was that the Afghans were making enquiries in Rawalpindi city as to the numbers of soldiers that could be billeted upon householders in the city. The Gupdar was rather surprised at these enquiries and he said that they made a bad impression in the city even upon those people who professed that they would welcome an Afghan occupation. The fact is, that the billeting system is unknown in India. In the past, armies have certainly levied contributions of provisions from the inhabitants, labour has been forced and animals impressed. But the idea of billeting soldiers upon the inhabitants was shocking to Indians. Perhaps the zenana system had something to do with this. How could soldiers, however friendly, be permitted to lodge with any household.

I rather think that when the full purport of the Afghan enquiry came to be realised there was a feeling against the delegates and they were not so popular when they drove abroad.<sup>1</sup> The numbers of their visitors fell off, too.

Then there came a day when the Gupdar said that orders had arrived from Kabul for the deputation to sign the peace treaty speedily and not to worry so much about details. It was to be made clear that the peace treaty was being signed in a temporary way because it was necessary that the forces facing each other on the Peshawar side should be removed to a safe distance from each other to avoid the risk of incidents. Later on a full peace treaty, which would go into all outstanding questions between the British Government and the Afghans, could be negotiated. The Afghans were in a hurry to settle matters at Rawalpindi because, since the Amir embarked on his unexpected campaign against us, Kabul had become more and more short of such necessary things as kerosene oil, petrol, motor tyres and sugar. The Amir was specially anxious to get his motor-cars going again and that was impossible without petrol and with flat tyres. 'Hurry up,' was the Amir's command. My Gupdar said, 'I think the treaty will be signed the day after to-morrow, but I will let you know definitely to-morrow.'



## A ROVING COMMISSION

On the morrow I went to see Maffey. He had nothing of any importance to impart to me, nor did he mention anything about my being present at the signing of any treaty. So I thought that for once the Gupdar had been mistaken. That night, however, the Gupdar came to see me again and we had a lesson in Pushtu that lasted for an hour. In the course of our conversation he said that he had absolutely certain information that the treaty would be signed the next day, and if I wanted to be present I should go down and be there when the doors opened. He said that several people had been asked to be present. I went down and found that the Gupdar was right again. There was a kind of formal air about the house. The doors of the big room in which the meeting was to be held were wide open and extra seats had been placed. People were already wandering in when I arrived and I took a good seat myself. In due course the Afghans arrived. While they were seating themselves Maffey sent word to me, just as if I had been told all about it and had come on his invitation, that it might happen that some hitch would arise and the conversation take a turn which it would not be right for the public to know about. In such a case all spectators and visitors would have to leave the hall.

So the proceedings started, and once again I saw

a scuffle for precedence amongst the Afghans. But there was evidence in the shape of great formal sheets of parchment on a table that something important was to be signed. The proceedings opened with the various provisions of the treaty, into which I need not enter here, being read out. The hitch came when a reference was made to boundaries. It should be known that only parts of the boundary between India and Afghanistan have been properly demarcated. The greater part of the line is a sort of rough no-man's-land occupied by the Border tribes who refused to owe any allegiance either to Great Britain or to Afghanistan. Still, there are parts that have been properly surveyed, and the frontier near Landi Khana is one of these parts. Apparently the delegations were discussing the rectification of this boundary. One of the Afghans said, 'I can assure you that Tor Khan is a purely Afghan village. I have lived in it myself for six years.'

Mr. Massey's reply was immediate: 'Then you must have been very uncomfortable, for Tor Khan is not the name of a village, but of a great bare rock. There is no water there.'

At this there was a general laugh, and the Afghans laughed more heartily than anybody else. But very shortly afterwards two or three Afghans began to speak all at once and there was every evidence of a storm brewing. It was at this juncture that word

was sent to the spectators in the hall that the further sittings would be private, at least for a time. So everybody not directly concerned filed out. We were all annoyed because none of us knew how long we should have to wait before we were admitted again.

Suddenly I decided to take a chance. The Gupdar had said that the treaty would be signed that day. I jumped into my tonga and drove furiously to the telegraph office. There I scribbled out a message of two words addressed to Buck at Simla. It had been arranged that all my messages should go first to Buck, who would distribute them to Reuter at home and to such papers as had subscribed to the service in India. My message contained the two words 'Treaty signed.'

The soldier-signaller, who took my message, started with joy when he read it. He dashed off with it to somewhere inside the office, and I left well content. I knew how eagerly the army in India had waited for peace, for it was known that as soon as a treaty was signed arrangements would be made to send home all the men due for demobilisation.

The officer who read the message, I learned afterwards, was equally pleased. I suppose arrangements had been made for news of the signing of the treaty to be flashed up to Simla without any delay. The line was to be cleared all the way. I have no doubt

it was cleared for my message. Afterwards, I learned that when the message reached Buck he stretched out his long arm for the telephone and asked for a number which put him into contact with somebody very important.

'What!' cried that officer. 'We have heard nothing of this. Are you certain?'

Buck, like myself, took a risk, and said, 'Yes.'

While Simla was humming with the news which soon spread, the delegates down in Rawalpindi were still hammering at the question of Tor Khan or whatever it was. Urgent telegrams of enquiry from Simla remained unopened. But it turned out that the Gupdar was right. I was right: so was Buck. In fact, the whole affair was very satisfactory to everybody. Nor did Maffey, or anyone, ever hint to me that I should not have sent that message before signatures had been actually appended to the treaty.

By rights I should stop my narrative of the Third Afghan War here. But I am in a talkative mood, and I think I have still one or two interesting facts in connection with that war to say. One relates, strange as it may appear, to a garden party. Sir Hamilton Grant gave the garden party at his residence to celebrate the signing of the treaty. The Afghan delegates were not able to leave Rawalpindi at once because they had various purchases to make

and, so I was told, were rather short of money, which had to be arranged for. There was thus ample time to send out invitations to the garden party.

After the guests had refreshed themselves pretty liberally, Sir Hamilton Grant got up to make his speech, which was translated sentence by sentence by an interpreter, congratulating the Afghans, and the British delegates also, on the successful issue to their deliberations. He said that he hoped that the treaty or armistice now signed would shortly take a more regular and precise form and that it would last for ever. He hoped that the relations between the two Governments, now successfully established, would never again be in danger. After he had finished speaking and the usual hand-clapping and applause, an Afghan delegate got up and made a most surprising speech. He said that thanks to the good sense of Sir Hamilton Grant and the other British delegates the fact that the Afghans had won the war was now established. Afghanistan, he continued, had not merely won the war, but had won her freedom. In future she would be no longer enslaved by the British Government and she could go on her way, making friends with whoever she liked.

Everybody was startled and I, personally, was greatly downcast. If the kind of treaty the Afghan mentioned had really been signed, then the British

delegates had let down their own country. The Gupdar had said nothing about any conditions which could possibly be construed into a victory for the Afghans. Occasionally, while this speech was being made, I glanced at Sir Hamilton Grant. He kept his composure very well indeed. When the Afghan delegate had finished there was some applause from the other Afghans present, but from nobody else. Then Sir Hamilton Grant got up in a lazy but effective way. There was a perceptible drawl in his voice. He started thus: 'Like a woman, I am going to have the last word, and like a woman's word, what I am going to say is going to be decisive.' There was electricity in the air. I wondered if there was going to be a scene which would end in the treaty being torn up, and the war starting again.

Sir Hamilton Grant went on to say that possibly the provision to which the Afghans referred was one relating to a decision on the part of the Government of India to interfere no longer with the right of the Afghan Government to establish relations with foreign Powers. If the Afghans called that decision 'regaining their freedom' they were welcome to do so, but while they would regain their freedom they had lost the annual grant of money which the Government of India paid to the Amir. Apparently this grant had originally been

paid in order to enable the Amir to buy arms against Russia. I know that some Amirs had not regularly drawn this money, and it was lying to the credit of Afghanistan in the Indian Treasury. Naturally, when this war started no more money was credited to the Amir in Afghanistan.

When Sir Hamilton Grant finished, everybody felt that the Afghans had been straining points in order to create the impression that they had won a victory. Towards the end of the evening everybody was happy and pleased and the farewells were informal and friendly. That night my Gupdar agreed that the Afghan deputation had only been boasting and that no one would pay much attention to what they had said. The Gupdar added that it might be worth my while to be present at the railway-station when the Afghans left, then I could see for myself the nature of the purchases they had made. He would let me know on what day and at what hour the train actually started. He did let me know, and I said that perhaps I had better get to the railway-station early as probably there would be a tremendous crowd from Rawalpindi city to see the Afghans off. The Gupdar said that he thought there would not be a big crowd because, although when the Afghans arrived people in the city were excited and enthusiastic about them, these enquiries, mentioned before, about how many soldiers

could be billeted in the city, had alarmed the citizens.

The Gupdar was right. There was no great crowd surging round the railway-station when I got there half an hour before the appointed time. Indeed, there was very little to show that anything unusual was happening. The platform was crowded, but still not too crowded, and I noticed great heaps of luggage piled outside each carriage. There were two or three waggons for goods too and outside these there were further heaps of cases and bales. The bulk of the luggage, or merchandise, consisted, as the Gupdar had said, of bags of sugar and of tins of petrol and kerosene and large numbers of motor tyres. Apparently the Afghans had found the money they needed for their purchases. I noticed some of the soldiers carried cages containing parrots and while looking at these I overheard a porter say that the Afghans had ransacked Rawalpindi for monkeys. It appeared that these animals were much prized in Afghan harems and zenanas as pets, and most of the members of the delegation had been warned by their wives not to return from India without monkeys as presents for the household.

Presently, I sensed that there was a hitch of some kind. The luggage was all there, but it was not being put into the carriages or waggons. There was a strange absence of porters, and the man to whom



I had spoken was not helping to put things into the carriages. I pursued my enquiries and discovered that after the goods had been unloaded from the bullock carts in which they had been brought, the outside coolies had not been properly paid, and some of them instead of payment had received blows from the Afghan soldiers. I, myself, saw a soldier come up to one of the few porters who were evident, seize him by the neck and give him a kick. This man had refused to handle luggage. In the end the soldiers and other servants of the Afghan delegation had to do the loading themselves and several times they were warned by railway officials that they had better hurry up for the train was due to start shortly. They did hurry up because, so I was told, on the journey down several men belonging to the party had been left behind at Attock as they had ignored the warnings of the railway staff that the train was about to start.

There was one man amongst the delegates whom I had not seen before. He had not taken part in the deliberations, but one could see from his manner and the respectful way in which he was treated by the other delegates that he was an important man. I do not know whether he was a Minister in the Cabinet, but he was a minister in another sense, for he was the highest ecclesiastic in Afghanistan. He wore a robe, and except for his turban he was

dressed in very much the same way as any high ecclesiastic would be in Europe. He had a proud face, a piercing eye, and such an appearance as one would connect with a man of power and resolution. I have said there were not many spectators from the city, but there were one or two and I think they had come to see this dignitary in particular off. When, finally, the train was on the point of leaving, these citizens of Rawalpindi knelt before the ecclesiastic and he put his hands on their heads and blessed them.

After the train had gone, without much waving of hands and shouting, I gathered from remarks amongst the people on the platform, including minor railway officials, that the rudeness and violence of the Afghan soldiers as displayed at the railway-station, combined with the billeting suggestion, had put an end to any ideas people in the Punjab might have had of how much more tolerable Afghan rule was than the British.

After the train had gone there was no reason why I should remain any longer in Rawalpindi, and so I left next day for Calcutta.

Any ideas I might have entertained that I had reported this Afghan war very successfully soon disappeared when I realised that very few people, even in India, took any interest in the war. The army, as I have said, was really interested, but in

Bengal the army and army affairs do not bulk very large in the minds of the inhabitants.

Outside India, as I have said, they did not know that there had been any Afghan war at all. In some ways the campaign was a disappointment to me. However, I soon forgot about it myself in the midst of other interests. I was reminded of the war at an Armistice dinner. I think Calcutta is about the only big city in the world in which a great dinner is held every year to signalise the signing of the Armistice. I refer, of course, to the European Armistice. There was present at this dinner an ex-officer wearing a medal and a ribbon that was new to me. I asked him what the ribbon meant and was told that it was the 'Arab Rebellion' ribbon. I had never heard of the Arab Rebellion, except in some very remote way which left no impression on me. Certainly I had never heard of it as being so big an affair as to justify the bestowal of a special ribbon on those engaged in it. There had not been any special 'Afghan ribbon, the troops engaged having to put up with the ordinary frontier medal with a clasp.

The officer wearing the Arab ribbon was amazed at my ignorance about the nature of the Rebellion. It appeared from what he told me – and I verified his remarks afterwards – that, shortly after the War and the signing of the Armistice, the Arabs, all up

and down the Euphrates and beyond Bagdad, had risen in rebellion against the British occupation, and attacked our troops. There had been two or three very serious engagements in which it might be said that the Arabs got the best of us. The Arabs, in fact, captured a British warship. An amazing affair. I could not credit this statement when it was first made to me, nor was the story in any of the papers at the time. But the thing did happen, as I discovered afterwards. The ship was one of the 'fly' type, designed specially for service in river waters. I think the warship had run ashore somewhere when hordes of Arabs surrounded it and kept on firing at it. The heavy ammunition on the ship was soon exhausted, and presently the sailors also ran out of their small-arms cartridges. But the story is still wrapped in mystery. No one wants to talk about it.

From all I have heard, this Arab Rebellion appears to have been a much more tragic and desperate affair than the Afghan War. Yet it is dismissed as an episode not worth taking any notice of, so I cannot see why the troops engaged in the Afghan War should grumble. The trouble in both cases was that the campaigns followed too quickly after the conclusion of the World War. Everybody was tired of war at that time and nobody wanted to discuss or hear about the subject.

## ALARMS AND EXCURSIONS

The story of these experiences on the Frontier would not be complete without a reference to that extraordinary excursion of the Moslem inhabitants of the Frontier Province to Afghanistan. I think it was a case of the mass hysteria which sometimes afflicts people who have very deep religious convictions. There used to be a belief among devout Moslems that it was not quite right for a Moslem to live in a country which was governed by anybody who was not a Moslem himself. This belief, of course, had disappeared from India many centuries before. I do not suppose it even existed during the Moghal Empire, because, except for Aurangzebe, the Moghal rulers were very tolerant where religion was concerned.

But there had been a sort of Islamic revival all over India for some years before the Great War. All kinds of traditional beliefs that had been forgotten were brought to light again, and amongst others was this one about the immorality of living under foreign rulers. In most parts of India, even by

Moslems, the attempt to induce the whole of the vast community to quit India and seek a living in a purely Islamic country was not considered seriously. I myself was present at a debate amongst some Moslem friends at which the subject was brought up. It struck me as very strange that nobody considered whether emigration was practically possible. The whole debate turned on whether there was any really religious justification for it. Were there any suitable texts in the Koran or in that body of traditional beliefs which is called the Shariat? The bulk of those present wanted to believe that there was no religious justification for emigration from India, and there was general applause and a conclusion to the argument when somebody quoted an ancient divine who was reported to have said, 'A Governor is appointed by God. For that reason you must honour him and obey him, even if he be a negro whose head is covered with boils.'

But there was no one on the Peshawar side to reason with or talk to the simple peasantry who were carried away with the new teaching. I think it is true that on the other side of the Frontier the people are not really religiously minded. They have their mullahs who incite them to war, but I do not think that there is any religious motive behind the wars waged by trans-Border Pathans. On the Indian side of the Frontier, whether the Moslems

concerned are of Pathan descent or not, religion is a serious thing. Once it began to be preached in the Frontier Province that no true believer could reconcile it with his conscience to live under the British Government, the Moslem peasantry began to make arrangements to leave India and settle in Afghanistan.

Reports began to arrive in Calcutta from all over the Frontier right down to Sind and Baluchistan to the effect that peasants were selling their homesteads and their cattle and were preparing to leave the country of their birth for a new life in a new land. The vanguard of the mass of emigrants, who were known as Muhajarin, had already arrived in Peshawar. I determined to make a week-end dash to Peshawar to get a personal view of what was happening. I got two or three days' leave on some excuse or other, and, with a Sunday intervening, I was able to get to Peshawar, spend twelve hours there, and be back without much dislocation of the newspaper work on which I was then employed.

Peshawar railway-station was a great mass of people when I arrived there; people who had come in with their wives and families and all kinds of household bundles. I was told at the station that the move to Afghanistan had already begun and that almost the whole length of the Khyber was packed with men and animals. The Government

of India did not take any active steps to stop this emigration beyond warning people not to be silly, for the Muhajarin had been selling their farms and cattle for anything they could get. But there was no use talking to these people. So the Government actually assisted those who wanted to get away. I say 'assisted' because special trains were run for the benefit of the emigrants. I think that if there had been no trains there would have been fewer emigrants.

Groups of emigrants, though excited, were not averse to talking to me, and the people to whom I spoke did not display any anti-British sentiment. They declared that the time had come for them to obey the religious law. They were not afraid of what might happen to them in the future, for they were in the hands of God. Besides, they had been informed that the Amir had already set aside large tracts of land for them. The march across the Khyber and to the tracts allotted to them would doubtless be full of hardship, but they were prepared to make it.

Looking at these simple fellows and their submissive wives with babies in their arms, I was suddenly reminded of the Pilgrim Fathers, those strong and hard men who, supported by religious convictions, were to found an empire across the seas. Would these Moslem peasants found some great



colony across the Frontier and add a new problem to be faced both by Afghanistan and India?

Ordinarily there are many preliminaries to be observed before it is possible for anybody, not actually living in those parts, to cross the Khyber. But these pilgrims were so many that nothing could be done about numbering or controlling them. I was able to get a pony, and I rode for a long way, nearly up to Ali Masjid, with the Muhajarin. A certain number had mules, a good many had pack bullocks, and there were numbers of donkeys. I saw a few bullock-carts loaded with women and children, but I was told that these hired carts would not go beyond Jamrud; thereafter the passengers would have to walk.

At that time there were still a number of troops in the Khyber and at Jamrud. I saw that all these troops were out watching the procession, the sepoy with a strange speculation in their eyes, and Tommies with frank amazement. They felt, I have no doubt, that they were witnessing a scene out of the Middle Ages or even before them – the exodus of a nation with their wives and their children and their menservants and their maidservants and their asses, and even with their dogs, for I saw many hounds panting along by the side of their masters.

That early morning was not so hot, but the road was very dusty, and long before the pilgrims had

reached Jamrud, which was the first halting stage, many were suffering from thirst. I wondered what they would do when they started to make the ascent of the Khyber, where water can only be obtained at one or two spots.

When I got to Jamrud I found a great concourse established on the plain there. Large numbers of these people had arrived by train, for that place was then the terminus of the railway. I was told that thousands of pilgrims had moved on that morning and were now on the trail to Fort Maude. Nobody attempted to restrain me, though generally all Europeans without definite passes are held up at Fort Jamrud. But now there was nothing new in the scenes on the road. Some men were marching along very bravely, but the whole movement was hampered by the women and children whom the men had to help along. I spoke to one or two of the men sitting by the roadside, and they admitted that it would be a bitter business getting into Afghanistan. But they were full of the story that the Amir had arranged for them and that they would be welcomed and fed and looked after when they reached Jelalabad. I had to leave Peshawar that night or I might have managed to fix up to stay at Ali Masjid for the night, and so continue up the Pass on the next day and on the day after to see exactly what kind of reception the pilgrims got

when they reached the actual frontier at Landi Khana. I turned back very reluctantly, and was duly seated in the train by dusk.

Now, though, I did not see for myself what happened at Landi Khana, I had seen enough to realise how desperate would be the plight of these poor people if it should turn out that no arrangements had been made for them in Afghanistan.

The Government of the Frontier Province, as might have been gathered from the preceding chapter, is not very keen on encouraging newspaper men. It is natural enough, because the Frontier is too touchy a place for reckless people to wander about in. Descriptions of the Muhajarin business were not very clear or complete, but still one or two of the Indian newspapers had correspondents in Peshawar who kept them fairly well informed, and from these papers, combined with what I had seen, I was able to visualise what actually took place.

Many of the unfortunate pilgrims never got beyond Jamrud. Others got as far as Fort Maude and no farther. The stream diminished at Ali Masjid and again at Landi Khana. Yet it was said that in the course of a week fifty or sixty thousand men, women and children had reached Landi Khana and gone on, and that there was a constant stream of people on the way, not only in the Pass, but coming up by train to Peshawar from every corner of the

Frontier. The correspondents of these Indian papers were, to begin with, undoubtedly in favour of the Muhajarin movement, but, as the days began to pass, their letters became less and less enthusiastic.

It appears that the first batch of pilgrims, consisting mostly of younger men who had outmarched the others, were received politely by the Amir's officials. They were patted on the shoulders, allotted a camping-ground, provided with provisions for the night and told that when they got to Kabul the Amir would treat them as if they were his own subjects and give them grants of land. These men went on quite happily next day, and in due course reached Kabul, where they were treated as they had been led to expect. The Amir saw them himself and told them that he had reserved for them some very good lands in Western Afghanistan. They were given another meal at the expense of the Government and then started on their arduous trek to the Promised Land. The next day there was another batch of immigrants who were similarly treated, but when a third batch arrived and it seemed, from the stories they told and from the information that the Amir was receiving from his officials at Jelalabad, that there was to be no end yet to the constant stream of men, women and children who were bringing no money into the country and so far had proved a burden upon it, the officials in Kabul

began to think that some steps should be taken to control the numbers of Indians permitted into the country.

The common people of Afghanistan viewed these strangers with suspicion. Would they not deprive many Afghans of a living if they settled in the country? The same views were entertained by the officials and people of Jelalabad. In addition a rumour grew in that part that the invaders were not actuated by religious motives at all but had come into the country with hostile intentions of some kind. They were spies of the British Government. This ridiculous story finally reached Kabul and was accepted the more eagerly because the pilgrims were now becoming a nuisance. Many of them had absolutely no money or anything to sell and were begging in the streets of Kabul. Something had to be done, and the Amir sent orders to Jelalabad that no more Indians were to be admitted into the country on any pretext. This order was passed on to the pickets and customs men at Landi Khana, and one morning batches of Muhajarin who had come down from Landi Kotal during the night found their passage barred.

The Afghans also made arrangements to round up and return to India all the pilgrims who were marching along the road to Kabul. The correspondent of one Indian paper said that there were

very many thousands of these people. A few hundred immigrants, who had already started on their journey to Western Afghanistan, were permitted to continue on their way. I have often wondered what the fate of these few was. They were making their way to a country which might or might not have provided them with arable land. But they were without any means for cultivating the land; they had no ploughs, no animals, no seed; they had no means of supporting themselves until they had grown crops. Besides, the local population would probably strongly resent the presence of these people. Anything might happen. I have never been able to find out what did happen to them. Once or twice I have seen references to Indian Muhajarin in Turkestan and those parts, and it was added that they had originally formed a portion of the great pilgrim stream that had left India.

Some of those who left India were men who had sold their homesteads and lands in the early days, and before the mass movement started, for quite good sums, and there were also, among them, professional men who had little fortunes of their own and who were prepared to risk all they had in the cause of religion. Some of these men, because of their previous standing and education, were accepted by the other pilgrims as leaders. There is a habit in India of bestowing upon prominent

men a variety of honorary titles which may be either of a lay or a religious nature. This honorific business is not understood or permitted in Afghanistan, a country where there is no middle class at all. There are a few rich people, the officials and the business folk, and the remainder of the population are mere peasants who are kept in a state of submission to the Government. The Afghans therefore were rather surprised when they heard of some of the pilgrims as being nobles of the highest degree, for the titles I have spoken of were taken from the days when India had numbers of rulers of her own. The Amir was asked to welcome people who were designated by titles as lordly as any that were applied to himself. He was annoyed, and the lords from India, after at first being treated with the greatest civility, were later sent back like their followers. It is not related that any of them were deprived of their money.

Now the Indian Government was faced with another difficulty, a difficulty not dissimilar to that which had faced the Amir at Kabul. What was to be done in this emergency? The decision taken was one which was to have an effect later on when an agitation of another kind was spreading through the Frontier Province. The Government decided that those who had sold their farms for practically nothing were to get their lands back. The Govern-

ment supplied the necessary money for the purchase. I have heard this scheme talked about in Calcutta, and everybody was full of admiration for the Government. There were a few grumblers among the Muhajarin, and these were men who had abandoned their professions and had come from parts of India other than the Frontier Province. The Muhajarin agitation penetrated to very distant parts of India, though, of course, it did not attack these distant parts to any very great extent. Still, there were some hundreds of families who did sell everything and make the march over the Khyber.

The extraordinary episode I have just described was not the only one of its kind that India has experienced. There was a Muhajarin exodus from India shortly after the Mutiny, but in this case the families that left the country did not do so in a great mass, nor did they move openly. And the exodus was not into Afghanistan but up the Valley of the Indus, above Attock. I suppose the Government might have stopped the movement, but perhaps it was thought that those who were taking part in it would not prove good subjects. They were allowed to go secretly as they thought. In later years it was discovered that these people, who had disappeared into wild and tribal countries, had been able to establish a small colony on the banks of the river, the course of which, at that time, was entirely



unknown to geographers. In India it was at first believed that all of them had been massacred by tribesmen. And I think that those early rumours were responsible for later stories which told how certain regiments, which had mutinied in India, had sought refuge in tribal country and been cut to bits by tribesmen who did not want them to settle in their country.

During some of our trans-Frontier expeditions, particularly in the Swat country, members of the colony I have referred to joined the ranks of the tribesmen and took part in the fighting against us – a fact which showed that the ‘Hindustani Fanatics’ as they were styled, had been accepted as part of the Pathan population. Many of these people had originally come from very distant parts of India, Madras and East Bengal, and they were easily distinguished from the tribesmen during the fighting. Their features and physique were different, and their clothing was dissimilar.

The Frontier Province did not quite settle down after the Muhajarin affair. A few years later there was another movement which might almost be described as a mass movement. ‘We are here touching on a subject which I want to avoid, politics. Indian politics are far too wild and confused for any man, who wants to keep his sanity, to dabble in or talk about: I have always tried to avoid

meddling in them. Let us see if I can talk about what happened in the Frontier Province about ten years ago without taking sides.

To begin with, the Province had been agitated and disturbed by a religious trouble, not among two rival communities, but among the Sikhs. A reform party had sprung up which thought that the priests in certain temples were growing too rich on the offerings of worshippers. These reformers, who called themselves Akalis, often resorted to violence, that is to say they went in a body to a given temple and attacked the priests. In some cases the priests were assaulted, and in nearly all cases they were turned out of the temple, which was taken possession of by the Akalis, from amongst whom individuals were chosen to control the temple revenues. This movement started, I believe, in Peshawar. Obviously the Akalis were in the wrong to resort to violence. But nothing was done by the Government on the ground that the affair was a purely religious one, and it is a principle with the Government of India not to interfere in matters of religion.

From the Frontier Province the Akali movement spread to the Punjab, in which province there was one affair which caused a great deal of discussion. The priests of a certain temple, learning of an attack that was to be made upon them, determined to

defend themselves. They therefore engaged a number of Afghans and Pathans as guards and armed them. On a certain day a large party of Sikhs arrived at the temple, saying that they had come to worship therein. These people were admitted into an inner courtyard and suddenly fire was opened upon them by the Afghan guards. Many were killed. Later on the Akalis said that the party had consisted of genuine worshippers who had no intentions upon the temple or the priests. The Government was called upon to take very severe measures against the priests. After many delays the Mohant of the temple and several other people were brought to trial and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.

This affair, and others in which violence was displayed by one side or another, caused the growth of a feeling in the Frontier Province that violence, even within the British border, could be indulged in without the Government taking strong steps to suppress it. The Sikhs in the Province now went about openly carrying swords. They said that the sword or kirpan was an emblem of the Sikh religion, and that it was the duty of every Sikh to carry one. But till that time the carrying of swords was an offence under the Arms Act, and it was considered a weakness on the part of the Government not to take any action against armed Sikhs.

In other parts of India Sikhs began to carry swords also, men who had never taken any part in the Akali agitation but who were only too pleased to go about flourishing weapons. In some parts of India I think local rules had been made under the Arms Act permitting Sikhs to carry kirpans, but they had to be not more than eighteen inches in length. I remember once when I had a Sikh company during the War for a short time, asking one of the Sikh officers what a kirpan exactly was. I knew it was a sword of some kind and that it was one of the five things that a Sikh must always possess.

Perhaps it is worth while mentioning what these five things are. In the vernacular the names of all these five things begin with a K and they are known as the 'Five K.s.' They are the kirpan, the quoit, the bracelet, which is an iron ring worn round the wrist, long hair (kesh) and drawers. The Sikh officer said that, although in the older days when the Sikhs were at war with the Moslems every man had to carry a sword, in these later days the sword was no more than a tiny thing, sometimes made of silver, stuck in the hair. It had a religious significance only, for the reason that when special bread was prepared for a Sikh priest the kirpan was used to make a sort of cross on it. It can be seen from the above that the kirpan is not a weapon at all, but to-day every Sikh carries at least that eighteen-inch dagger. The

taximan who drives anybody about in the streets has a dagger under his waistcoat. Ask him if he has a kirpan and he will show it to you.

The Frontier Province, as it was the first to start an Akali agitation, was also the first to return to normal conditions, and the affair of the Afghan guard and the Sikh worshippers that I have mentioned above did not have on the Frontier the repercussion that it might have had, had it taken place at an earlier date.

It was quite early in the year 1927 that an agitation of a strange kind was apparent in the Frontier Province. It was a political agitation, but neither the Sikhs nor the Hindus took any part in it. Meetings were held everywhere, particularly in the Peshawar district, to denounce the Government. The grievances that were put forward were of a general kind. Nothing had happened to make the people restless, at least, against the Government. Indeed, as I have said, the generous way in which the Muhajarin business had been settled made numbers of Moslems very satisfied with the Government.

What had these others to complain of? I think the belief, at first, both amongst the civil and military authorities was that foreign agitators had been at work. It was known that men were going to and fro suggesting grievances and telling falsehoods about what the Government proposed to do.

Some of these men had been trained in the Bolshevik propaganda school at Tashkent. Presently the meetings began to grow in number, and at them suggestions were made that everybody should refuse to pay taxes of any kind. That was bad enough, but at other meetings speakers proposed actual violence against the police and civil officers generally. That, of course, was going too far, and presently the civil authorities prohibited the meetings at which violent talk was indulged in. There were collisions with the police in consequence and one very ugly affair in Peshawar city, to deal with which troops had to be used.

I was never able to get details of this business, but it would appear that the appearance of the troops only served to infuriate the mob more. It was generally believed that the troops would not dare to fire upon the people of Peshawar. An armoured car driving through the city ran over and killed a man. This was a signal for an attack upon the car, the occupants of which were pulled out and battered to death. The car was set on fire. No one seems to know why the soldiers in the car made no attempt to defend themselves. After this affair more troops were sent into the city, and it was decided to keep them there for several days. In this connection another even more alarming thing occurred.

A company of a certain Indian regiment which

was under orders to go to the city did not turn out when commanded to. But I will not go into that. The men concerned were punished, but not very severely, and the regiment, I think, was moved from Peshawar. These two affairs gave heart to a number of disorderly elements in Peshawar city, and I think I am right in saying that the authorities removed the European banks that were in the city to safer quarters in the cantonment, and the police were told to evacuate their posts in the city, thus leaving it entirely in the hands of the people.

One would have thought that arson and robbery, and murder, would have been the immediate consequence, but leaders suddenly appeared who kept the disorderly elements in check, and, though many Hindus must have had a very anxious time, nothing serious happened in the city itself.

But outside the city disorders grew. There were murders and robberies in villages outside Peshawar. A number of Afridis came down from the hills and camped in what is known as the Kajauri Plain, a region of tangled water-courses and ravines at the base of the hills and within a few miles of Peshawar. The Afridis lived in caves in the plain during the day, and at night they went out on all kinds of unlawful occasions.

One crowd of outlaws, consisting both of tribesmen and of British subjects, took possession of a

series of orchards and vegetable gardens, not far from the railway-station. These gardens were surrounded by a high wall to keep out thieves, but they failed to keep the outlaws out. The malcontents, after staying in the gardens at ease for three or four days, organised an attack upon a big supply depot, belonging to the military, close at hand. It was surrounded by a twenty-foot wall, very smooth and having no windows of any kind. When I was in the army and stationed at Peshawar I had to visit this depot once or twice when my company provided the guard, and I remember the subahdar in charge saying with a laugh that it was not much use having sentries inside the wall. They could not see anyone approaching, and if the wall were scaled, the first information the sentries would get of anything unusual, or of an attack, would be people dropping on them from above or shooting them down.

This is exactly what did happen. The outlaws not only had scaling ladders, but were able to work unperceived under the wall, making great holes in it. Many got inside the depot. Several of the store-sheds were set on fire, several sentries were killed and a good deal of property stolen. The exact extent of the damage done was not revealed.

These events naturally perturbed the civil authorities and the military. The Government of India



had also to come to a decision as to what was to be done. A stern resolve was taken, and it was decided to declare martial law through the Peshawar district, it being evident that the situation had got beyond the control of the civil administration.

But the Government of India was uneasy about martial law, several of the highest officials having memories of what had happened when martial law had been proclaimed at Lahore and Amritsar nine years previously. Presently the stern resolution was modified in an unusual way; it was announced that the martial law would be administered by civilians.

Outrages of various kinds continued in Peshawar even after martial law had been imposed; so I was told by a man who had recently come down from those parts. He said life was being made intolerable to many British residents. When I asked him why, he was unable to give an answer. He did not know what grievances the agitators had, beyond the general grievance that they were not governing themselves.

Then one day came the announcement that the wives and children of officers in Peshawar, and, indeed, all European women and children, had been ordered to leave the district. Something serious was certainly afoot. But what? I do not know if I will be believed, but I spent sleepless nights wondering about the situation. Finally I could bear it

no longer. I must go and see for myself what was happening and try and discover the reason for it. My editor was, at first, averse to my going. He did not share my views about the seriousness of the situation; and I suppose he was going on such Press messages as were allowed to come through from Peshawar. But I knew Peshawar a little by this time, and I also knew the kind of censorship which had been imposed. I finally persuaded my editor to let me go.

To show the view taken in a place so far distant as Calcutta of the situation in Peshawar, I was not able to get any kind of servant to come with me. There had been no difficulty about servants for any of the wars, including the Great War; they were always forthcoming, and I could have had them in dozens on other occasions, but this time I could get no one to come with me. However, off I started, hoping to pick up a man at Rawalpindi or in Peshawar itself. (I found a man in Rawalpindi, but he disappeared when we got to Nowshera.) The first evidence of anything wrong was when we crossed the river at Attock. There was a refreshment car on the train, and I went to it after the sun had set to get a drink. The khidmatgar refused to serve it, and he gave as his reason that a certain leader had ordered that sahibs were no longer to get drinks in the afternoon. He added that he would willingly give me a drink,

but the last time he did it a red-shirt on the platform had struck him a blow and spilled the drink.

Who were these red-shirts? They were people who had joined the movement which had caused some of the trouble, and originally they had worn red shirts as a sort of uniform. But the shirts were made of a very flimsy material and soon went into rags. The red-shirts then showed a bit of red in their turbans or carried a red pocket-handkerchief. This fact was told me by the khidmatgar. I then began to look out for red-shirts on the railway platforms, but I did not see very many, and I noticed that one or two men who displayed red handkerchiefs hastily put them away when they saw me looking at them.

The next piece of evidence I had of something unusual going on in Peshawar was at Nowshera. My train reached that station a little before dark. It seemed to halt for a very long time, and I noticed that most of the passengers got out of it. In fact, after I had paraded the platform once or twice I found I was the only passenger left. I asked a railway official who was passing, when the train was going on. He replied that it was not going on at all that night, because it was considered dangerous to run into Peshawar at night. There might be sniping, stones would certainly be thrown, also an attempt might be made to derail the train. He said

that my best plan would be to go to sleep in the carriage. The whole train would wait where it stood, and it would go on about ten the next morning. Shortly after this conversation, when I looked for my servant to make up my bed, I found he had disappeared.

It was a terribly hot night; also there were mosquitoes about; also a cinder had got into my eye near Attock. Altogether I had a very bad night, but I must have dozed off in the early morning because I was awakened by a man who brought me a cup of tea. I suppose he belonged to the refreshment room. Anyway it struck me that he might come along with me to Peshawar as my servant. I put it to him. He said he would come gladly but he was owed eight rupees by the refreshment contractors and he could not afford to lose that. On being told that I would pay him those eight rupees he said he would certainly come and held out his hand. He had an honest face and I knew I would need a servant badly at Peshawar, so I produced the money and gave it to him. He took it and then, saying that he would have to go into the city to arrange a few matters but would be back before the train left, he went away.

Shortly afterwards a train steamed into the station from the Peshawar side, an armoured train. There were sandbags all over the engine, a machine gun

fixed up in some way on the tender, and several other machine guns poking their heads out of carriages and out of the guard's van. There were a number of British soldiers in the carriages, and somebody on the platform told me that the train would probably stay at Nowshera for a couple of hours and would then go back to Peshawar.

There were some officers having an early tea in a first-class carriage opposite my own carriage and I clambered down and up and introduced myself to them. They asked me to have some more tea, but told me they had no information to give. Their job was to run the train between Jamrud and Peshawar and see that the line was clear. They said that there had been a good deal of odd skirmishing and fighting with outlaws outside Peshawar, but there had not been any trouble in the city for quite a time. When I enquired whether matters had improved outside Peshawar recently they were unable to say.

The presence of this train at Nowshera impressed me a good deal. One does not expect to see armoured trains in parts of India supposed to be settled and civilised. One could see at once that this was a kind of emergency train hastily put together and hastily manned by details picked up from various units. Somehow I also got the impression that the officers were holding something back. Perhaps

there had been some kind of general order that they should not talk to strangers. Or perhaps their experience in the War, when there was so much 'hush-hush' about, had taught them to say nothing about military affairs to people who suddenly introduced themselves. The attitude of these officers reminded me of what happened to me at Port Said very shortly after the War started. I was hurrying back to India at the time when the Canal was full of transports carrying the Indian divisions to France. At a restaurant I got into conversation with some officers of the Indian Army. I was greatly interested in the troops that were going out and asked several questions about them, including one about the officer who was commanding them. 'It's Willcocks, of course,' said one officer. After he had said this I saw him biting his lip, and another officer present, a senior man who had said nothing, told the officer who had spoken, very curtly, that he should not talk to strangers about the troops, particularly at Port Said, which, he said, was now full of spies. The officer flushed red, and I said I was very sorry. Somehow, the incident had remained with me all this time.

Something similar happened to me when I was seven or eight years of age. A regiment had passed by, and I had run to an aged aunt afterwards, saying that it was a Scottish regiment and that I had

counted the files and I thought there were about six hundred men. My aunt had been in Paris during the Franco-Prussian War. Instead of expressing pleasure at my news, she rebuked me for talking about regiments and their names, and especially for counting the men and blurring the numbers out. 'Because,' she said, 'there are always spies about'; and she added that expression which was heard so often in Paris during the War: 'Walls have ears.' These two incidents were in my mind when I went back to my own train. Something big must be about to happen when soldiers do not want to talk about their affairs. As a rule they are ready enough to answer questions.

Before my train started I was glad to see the servant I had engaged running into the station with his bedding. He saluted me and I saw him go into the servants' compartment attached to my carriage. So that was all right, and I was greatly relieved. The train duly ran into Peshawar station. I noticed on the way an armed guard at Pabbi station, and I also noticed that the supply depot outside Peshawar city, which had been attacked and partially looted, was now in a state of defence. Holes had been made in the high blank walls, and in them machine guns were mounted. There were sandbags on the roof and one could see the turbans of sentries showing above the bags.

At Peshawar station there were more troops, apparently forming some kind of a guard. Remembering what had happened during my last visit to Peshawar, I was wondering whether I would be able to get rooms anywhere at all, for I thought of the cantonment as bristling with troops. But on enquiring from a tonga-wallah I was told that there was lots of room at the hotel, most of the visitors having left. There were no soldiers there. So there I went with my servant and luggage. Yes, there was room, lots of room, said the manager with a grin; and so I installed myself at the hotel.

Breakfast was about to be served, and I went into the dining-room. There were only four or five other people and two nurses. I found this strange, for I had been told and had read that all European women and children had been directed to leave the station. Later on, I was to learn that, though all the wives and families of military officers had left, quite half a dozen wives and families of European civilians had not left. In fact, the wife of the manager of the hotel was still living in the hotel.

After breakfast I thought I had better go round and deliver various letters of introduction I had obtained, addressed to leading officials and to the General Officer Commanding. I enquired at the hotel whether I could get a car. Remembering how I had not been allowed a car during the Afghan



War I feared that I would not be allowed to hire one now. But the manager of the hotel told me that there would be no difficulty at all. As far as he knew no cars had been commandeered, and he arranged for me to have a car every day for as many days as I liked.

Just before I started on my rounds I saw the servant I had brought from Nowshera being chased by three or four men. He called out to me, and the men ran away when I approached. My servant was very frightened, swearing that the men who had been about to assault him had told him that it was forbidden to serve a sahib. How dare he come into Peshawar as my servant? He said that if he stayed with me he would undoubtedly be killed. I went to the manager again, and he agreed that it would be better to allow the man to go back to Nowshera, but I need not trouble about a servant, they would find me one who would not be afraid of the scoundrels that were permitted to roam the streets in these days.

Later on the car arrived and I started to deliver my letters. At first I called at Government House and wrote my name in the book and left my cards there. Then, I asked to see the private secretary to the Chief Commissioner. I do not think I was able to see him that day. Anyway, after a great deal of hunting, I found the Chief Secretary to Government, for

whom I had a letter. I saw him for a few minutes, and he told me that if I wanted information of any kind I could get it by going to see So-and-so. I went, only to find that I had been sent to an officer who was to censor any messages I telegraphed from Peshawar. He did not give me very much information, and I realised that it would be very hard to get anything out of the civil authorities. Next I went to the office of the General Officer Commanding. I had a letter for him which I left. I saw him also for a few minutes, and he told me that there was a military censorship, but if I called on such-and-such an officer he would give me any information that was available. I called upon him and found again that very little was available. It was then dawning upon me that if I depended on the civil or military authorities for news I would not get enough news to justify my presence in Peshawar.

Then I went back to the hotel and tried to write out an impression of things as they appeared to me. While I was at work on this message I heard that kind of tramping, rustling noise that is made on dusty roads by cavalry at a walk. I never could resist the sight of cavalry going by, and I rushed out of the hotel to watch. I saw at once that the men and horses were tired, and that the horses were thin and what cavalry soldiers call 'fine.' Now, horses do not get 'fine' after a single day's hard work. They have

to be kept at it day after day to reach that condition. Now, what is it, I thought to myself, that the cavalry are doing here day after day that their horses should be so out of condition ?

In the afternoon I went round to see two Press censors. The civilian Press censor knocked out a good slice of my message and the military censor knocked out a good slice more; they had no information of their own, and the message that was left was hardly worth sending off. I then went to the Peshawar Club and fixed up as a temporary member, hoping that perhaps in the relaxation of the afternoon I might find somebody I had known before and who might be willing to tell me what was afoot. I found no one. There were no civilians there at all.

After dinner at the hotel that night, I felt that something desperate must be done if I were to obtain any inkling of the real situation. Why was everybody so silent ? If you have read the previous chapters of this book you will remember the Gupdars who were so useful to me during the Afghan War. I thought of them too, but I might as well say now that I could not get in touch with the man I had employed at Peshawar, though I tried for several days, enquiring cautiously for him by the name he had given me. I wrote him a cautious letter at his former address in Peshawar city, but

there was no reply. Then one day I asked my driver to drive me to Peshawar city. He refused to go, saying it was too dangerous, and I was told later by the hotel management that in any case I would not have been allowed into the city, as there was an order prohibiting Europeans entering it.

Six or seven days must have passed by without my getting any information of value. The few people in the hotel were full of stories of disorders in the district and of troops and police in conflict with villagers and outlaws. But neither the civil nor the military authorities would allow any of the stories to pass. I did gather that the military had taken some steps to prevent outlaws sheltering in the Kajauri Plain. When I asked whether it was true that a large section of that plain had been surrounded by barbed wire to prevent outlaws making use of the caves and other hiding-places in it I got evasive replies, but I was pretty certain that something of the kind was being done. I was also morally certain that troops were being stationed at various points along that barbed wire. But nothing of this apparently was to be told to the public.

The only really interesting thing that happened when I was at Peshawar this time, at least to me, was a night I had with a battalion of the 7th Rajput Regiment which had been marked down for Indianisation. I met an officer of the battalion at the

club, and he asked me to dine with him. There was, at the time, a good deal of curiosity, both at home and in India, about the Indianised regiments. How were they doing? Well, this regiment had only two British officers; all the rest, including the adjutant and the quartermaster, were Indians. You could not have told from the demeanour and address of any that they were not British officers. That guest night was like a guest night with any regiment. I saw the unit once or twice, exercising, and it was just as good as any other.

Later on the battalion was sent to take its share of duties at the Kajauri Plain, and subsequently during some operations against the Mohmands it greatly distinguished itself. So that puts an end to the idea that some old stagers had that the sepoy army would deteriorate unless it had British officers. These old stagers forget that in the earliest days the regiments of the East India Company had hardly more than two British officers each; some had only one. I do not see at all why the products of the Indian Sandhurst should fail in any way to keep alive the traditions of the Indian Army – provided that they keep away from politics.

I think I was no more than ten days at Peshawar, striving to make bricks without any straw. It was not long before I discovered that there were three sets of opinions in Peshawar about the situation

generally. The civil service people seemed to think that the situation was not very difficult and would presently ease off altogether. The railway people thought the situation was not very good, that it might become worse, but that in any case there would be ample warning before there was a real explosion. The soldiers thought the situation was very bad and that there might be an upheaval, supported by Afridis from the hills, at any moment.

There were times when I was inclined to agree with the soldiers, and yet it is hard for me to put a finger on any actual fact or incident which inclined me to this view. It was a sort of general impression I got while moving about Peshawar and observing people in the streets. I do not say the servant class were inclined to be rude. The man I had got from the hotel was a very good man indeed, though I have to say that from time to time he would come to me and say, 'Why do we stay here? Let us both go back to Calcutta. It is dangerous here.' He had evidently discovered that I did not belong to Peshawar. Sometimes outside the actual area of the cantonment one met villagers or tribesmen who looked very truculent. Once or twice I thought I would be stopped, or something worse might happen, and my driver was in a funk all the while. He wanted to drive safely and quietly about the cantonment itself.

One day I got a senior officer to talk a little. I was on the subject of the posts outside Peshawar, and I said I would like to visit places like Abazai and Shabkadr. Would there be any objections? He said that he did not know, but he thought there would not. 'In these days,' he added, 'anybody can go where he likes. More is the pity.' Obviously the officer wanted to restrict the movements of certain people, and probably the military would have done so had they been administering martial law themselves.

On the very next day the civil censor, who had already been changed once or twice, said he thought he could give me some information regarding one or two individuals about whose history I had been enquiring. He gave me the history of one man, whom the military censor had indicated was a terrible fellow, at length. This history showed that the terrible fellow was not so very terrible. He was a man who had been misled rather than anything else.

The world at large is, I think, rather bored by stories of good and pure men, but the facts that had been given me I added to my message, thinking that they were better than nothing at all.' When I went to the military censor with my message the General was in the room, and he said in a pleasant way that he would like to censor the message himself. He read what I had written with, I could see, some

disquiet. Finally, he said he was sorry he could not pass my message. It was all wrong, and I was trying to whitewash a very dangerous character. Then: 'Where did you get this story from?'

'I got it from the civil Press censor.'

'Who is he?'

'I told the General his name. 'Never heard of him,' said the General.

The censor concerned would, I think, have been annoyed at finding himself unknown. Anyway, I told the General the position the civil censor occupied in the civil world, but the General had no care for that. He cut out everything that I had been told.

It was then that I realised that there was probably no chance at all of my getting anything interesting through. I might hang about Peshawar for months before anything happened, wasting my own time and my newspaper's money. I felt that I should leave Peshawar. Although after I had gone down to the station and booked my seat in the train I had a tremendous feeling that I was neglecting a great opportunity of witnessing some dramatic event.

'Is that your whole story?' says the reader. 'If so, it does not seem to have a proper end. What did happen at Peshawar?'

That is the point of it. In spite of all my premonitions and warnings, nothing did happen at Peshawar.



Year by year I waited for something to happen, but after a time the civil commotions died away. British subjects in the district became normal again. Of course, the people on the other side remained what they had always been: a lawless lot. If the Afridis, as a whole, became less troublesome, it was because they were now making pots of money over the railway through the Khyber. The expenses of maintaining that railway are almost as great as were those of building it, and there is always trouble with the permanent way. They say it is due to sudden torrential rainfall. Culverts always seem to be giving way, and once the railway was closed for months because a great subsidence took place in a tunnel. It appears that a part of the rock through which the tunnel had been cut was composed of sand and not of rock. The sand had to be taken out and the hole filled with concrete – a very expensive business. I think as long as the Afridis are employed to look after the railway and permanent way they will not give trouble. They like money.

Here is a narrative about war, and yet where are the glories and victories and the triumphant return home? Perhaps that is my art, or perhaps the narrative has ended as it does just because there is nothing more to say. Whichever of the two things may be true, the fact is that, reading over what I have said, it seems to me that I have correctly

presented the Frontier as it is. There are never any glorious victories, never any triumphant returns to barracks. A mobile column slides out of camp or barracks at dawn. There is no one to watch it move off, except perhaps a sleepy servant who, his master not being detailed to go, is standing outside the kitchen with the sahib's tea-tray in his hands.

Then, when a battle is fought, the thrill is only momentary. There is hardly ever any pursuit or the elation of chasing the flying enemy. You might as well try and chase a wild goat. Then, after a few days, or a few weeks, or even a few months, of privation, hunger and thirst, when the troops return to their cantonment, there is no one to cheer them.

The general has ridden on ahead. Various units march independently of each other. There is no long column to impress beholders, if there are any. When a regiment turns into its own quarters there may be two or three men waiting at the entrance. They gaze anxiously at each company as it marches in. Finally, one of the men ventures to ask a sergeant or a havildar where private or sepoy So-and-so is. He gets a brief reply: 'He's dead. And it's bad news for you, Bunnia-jee.' So it is, for the dead man owed the bunnia money.

There may be a 'widow in sleepy Chester' who mourns for the dead man, or some months later a memorial may even go up in a school chapel.

## A LOVING COMMISSION

Qui procli hinc, the legend I want,  
The Frontier gave a far away;  
Qui ante diem, perit,  
Sea miles ad pro patria.

Yes, the Frontier is arid and futile. Peril there is, and slaughter, but not of a very romantic kind. A battle won does not fill the troops with pride, or if there is any pride it is only of the kind that follows the scotching of a snake. I have heard a planter tell of how, hearing an outcry among some coolies working close to his bungalow, he dashed out with a shotgun and blew the head off a king cobra which had taken up its position amongst the bushes. It was a very large one, but he said he had no joy in slaying it. A snake is hardly a trophy, and the danger from it is not of a romantic kind. I suppose the same kind of feeling of futility that succeeds the killing of a snake attaches also to Frontier warfare. There is no fun in it.

